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briarpatch

FIERCELY INDEPENDENT

Decolonizing the Emergency

Shelter in the colonial present

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FIERCELY INDEPENDENT

Volume 43, Number 3 - May/June 2014

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Briarpatch publishes six thought-provoking, fire-breathing, riot-inciting issues a year. Fiercely independent and frequently irreverent, *Briarpatch* delves into today's most pressing issues from a radical, grassroots perspective, aiming always to challenge and inspire its readers.

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violent relations

The winter before I joined *Briarpatch* I worked at a daytime drop-in centre for the homeless in Edmonton. Most of the community who used the centre were Indigenous men who slept outside throughout the winter, generally in camps pitched in the wide valley of the North Saskatchewan River that winds beneath the provincial legislature, itself built beside the wooden palisades of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post that gave Edmonton its name.

For the men I got to know while working at the centre, there was more dignity in braving the extreme cold than in entering the city's shelters. Their circumstances as Indigenous people, homeless on the traditional lands of the Plains Cree and Blackfoot, in the thick of Alberta's bitumen boom, offer a window into Canada's colonial present.

One of the most gentle and widely loved of the regulars at the drop-in centre, an Inuit guy we'll call Simon, loved to play the old upright piano that sat next to the small library of *National Geographic* magazines. As friends chatted over bowls of instant noodles and played cards while waiting for their clothes to cycle through the washer and dryer, Simon transformed the room with his piano playing, creating a world in sound that held both the pain and the courage, the dispossession and the resilience, of their lives.

One December evening Simon came in particularly distraught, crying. After staff's unsuccessful attempts to console him, he went outside to the busy street and tried to kill himself by jumping in front of traffic. A staff person pulled him off the road and sat with him, waiting for the police to arrive. When two officers showed up to take Simon away, he resisted – fought back – as if his life depended on it.

Within 20 minutes Simon had attempted suicide and then defended himself from the armed guards of the status quo, the police, who were called to restore public order and safety.

It was a very Canadian moment, enacting so much of the settler-colonial scene. Untold events like this – countless but rarely broadcast – invite questions. What is the role of settler Canadians in a relentless emergency that has become – and has long been – everyday life for so many Native people? What is our role in a situation where front-line services reinforce experiences of dispossession and trauma, where scores of Indigenous communities live without potable water or decent shelter, and where Indigenous women face unconscionable levels of abuse, violence, and humiliation?

Few settler Canadians have purposefully built the structures of dispossession and incremental violence that generate and maintain these realities. But to the extent that our health, economic, educational, and cultural realities eclipse those of Native people, we have nonetheless benefited.

While we should be thankful for those who do, it is not the responsibility of Indigenous people to educate Canadians about

Fort Edmonton, circa 1871.
Photo: Major James Skitt Matthews Collection

the circumstances of Indigenous oppression. That responsibility rests with us, the non-Natives whose material privilege is rooted in an ongoing colonial relationship we must be able to recognize in order to change. Awakening to this emergency is not a favour to others but instead a step toward a different relationship with these resource-rich lands and their First Peoples.

We are all enriched by the recognition that no one's potential can be reached so long as that of others is under constant threat.

Andrew Loewen, Editor
andrew@briarpatchmagazine.com

Announcements and new web content

In the last issue we published the winners of our third annual creative writing contest. Special thanks, once more, to our esteemed judges Marcello Di Cintio and Shani Mootoo. Head to our website to read runner-up entries by Trina Moyles (non-fiction) and Emma Feutl Kent (short fiction). Also online is Bruce Rice's winning essay for best local entry. Mr. Rice will join acclaimed author Trevor Herriot for lunch at Regina's Willow on Wascana restaurant. Thanks again to RPIRG, House of Anansi Press, and Goose Lane Editions for their support of new and emerging writers. And to the many courageous writers who shared your stories with us: thank you.

Journalist D'Arcy Hande has a new article on our website, following up on his investigative story, "Courting Collaboration" (November/December 2013). Documents received via a Freedom of Information request reveal that from 2010 to 2013 more than $400,000 was paid to the Northern Village of Pinehouse by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization, all in an effort to bring radioactive waste to the northern Métis community. Read the story at: briarpatchmagazine.com

Special thanks to our Andrea Walker Memorial Fund editorial committee: Jane Kirby, Naomi Moyer, and Evie Ruddy.

You'll notice something different at the centre of this issue. It's a glimpse of the future as we move to publish in full colour for the first time.

Michael Bell is a photographer who works part time for the *Regina Leader-Post* and occasionally for the Canadian Press.

Julie Coleman has been the executive director of the Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter Association for eight years. She has been blessed with friendships and invitations to participate in collaborations with First Nations communities in Treaty 7 and 8 territories since 1997.

Emily Davidson is a Halifax-based artist, worker, and activist.

Matthew Davidson is a writer based out of Peterborough, ON. He writes on Haiti, history, and development.

Laura Ellyn is a Montreal-based writer and artist whose work has appeared in local and national publications. She runs a horror movie fanzine at houseofhorrorzine.tumblr.com.

Street photographer **dm gillis** was born and raised in Vancouver and has spent the last 30 years documenting the changing city. He has a passion for capturing the human side of the hardest parts of town.

Emily Lindsay Jackson, PhD, is a social scientist researcher and teacher based in Edmonton. Her work explores intersections between gender, (in)security, and society.

Gayle Strikes With A Gun was born and raised on the Piikani Nation in southern Alberta. She has an MA from the University of British Columbia and over 25 years experience in the education field. She works in the outreach department at the Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter.

Emily McGratten is a B.C.-based freelance illustrator and comic artist. She recently graduated from the illustration program at OCAD University in Toronto and holds a BA in English literature.

Doris Sweet Grass is the manager of the Kainai Women's Wellness Lodge on the Blood reserve in southern Alberta. Doris is a proud member of the Blood Tribe and holds several diplomas. She was the executive director of the Native Women's Transition Home Society in Lethbridge, AB for 11 years.

Aleksandra McHugh is a non-fiction mother and stay-at-home writer who recently completed her first novel, set in Regina's inner city. Her academic experience includes a master's degree in criminology from Simon Fraser University and studies in human and social development at the University of Victoria.

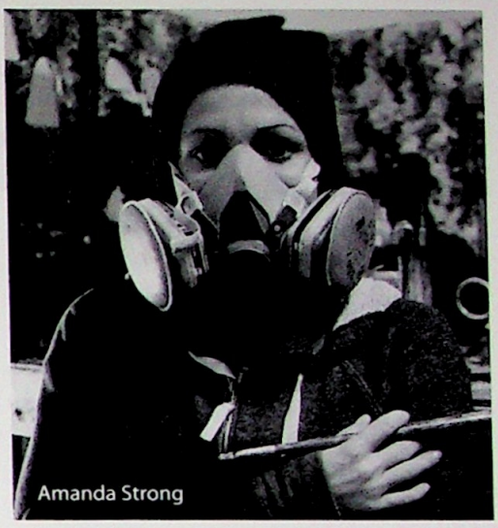
Matthew Mickleborough is a writer, printmaker, and muckraker based in Regina, SK.

Alessandra Naccarato is a Vancouver-based writer and artist educator with a background in community organizing and zine publishing. Currently completing an MFA in creative writing at the University of British Columbia, she has toured nationally and internationally as a spoken word artist and has facilitated hundreds of workshops with youth across Canada. Her album of poetry and music, *Hunger & Lightning*, will be released in summer 2014.

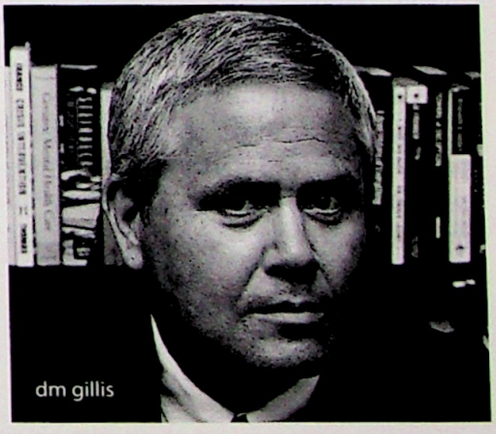
Tiana Reid is a Toronto-born writer living in New York.

Matthew Ryan Smith, PhD, is a writer, independent curator, and educator based in Toronto. His writings have appeared in *FUSE, Canadian Art, C Magazine, Afterimage,* and numerous academic journals, including the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies.*

Amanda Strong is a Toronto-based artist with a keen interest in combining illustration, photography, filmmaking, and the web. She was the imagineNATIVE/LIFT Mentorship recipient in 2010 for her experimental short, *Honey for Sale.*


Amanda Strong

Alessandra Naccarato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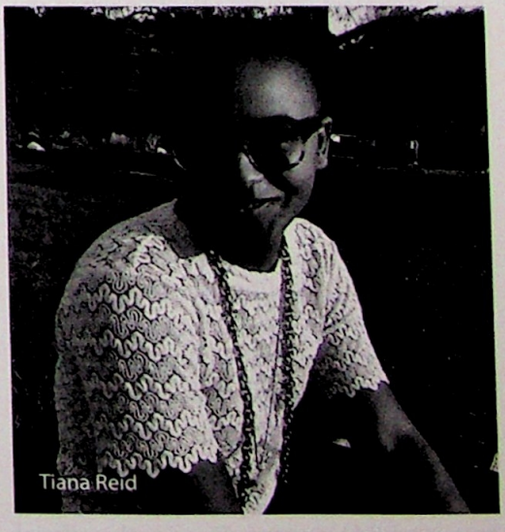

Tiana Reid

The trouble with normal

THANKS, Baijayanta Mukhopadhyay ("When Psychiatry Burns," March/April 2014), for this rare insider's glimpse into psychiatry's drive to expand its territory through the twinning of normative and financial motives.

Of your many sharp insights, there is one I'd like to pick up, that "diagnosis has meant access to resources that were otherwise denied to some people." Access to resources, as tied to the recognition of legitimate difference, is such a powerful organizing feature of so many medicalized encounters that it's worth elaborating.

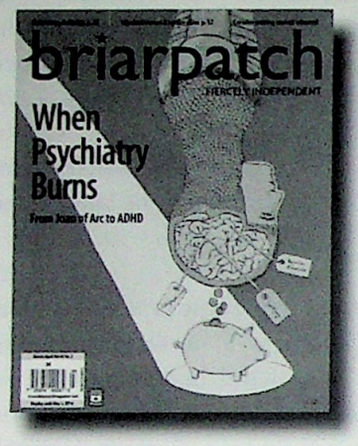
My own vantage on psychiatry was front seat to my mother's schizophrenia. As a female-headed household on welfare, we were already of interest to authorities and so were easily cycled into adjoining systems of psychiatry and foster care.

My first response was that of a child. I resisted. I named psychiatry's overreach as the problem. I denied that there was anything wrong with us. I wanted the doctors, the social workers, all the embodiments of social control, out of our lives.

But gradually, I learned that psychiatry and welfare and foster care are not institutions you can just say no to. Not if you are a single mother with repeated bouts of hellish delusion. Not if you are seeking disability benefits as a person who has been put out by the work-world in all its glorious inclusiveness. You can't say no because the distress is real and you need resources. Social control is most effective when you need something, when you invite them in.

Something similar is at play with the epidemic of ADHD and other childhood maladies. If your child can't conform to the school's rules and routines, they are either impaired or they are bad. If it is not their brain, then it's a choice. Of course, no one can show you the line in a person's body or soul between can't and won't conform. And this line wouldn't matter if the differences were considered valid.

But with normalcy out of reach, the choice is between pathology and infamy. The positive space to define yourself and/or your child is narrow. Despite the official policy that school resources are not tied to



a diagnosis, the fact is that doctors' assessments, whether they are from psychiatric professionals or GPs, deliver a stamp of legitimacy.

And so much of it is, as you say, about poverty and power. The arrogance of the bourgeois family ideal remains a powerful model against which non-conforming students and parents are judged lacking.

Of course, some attempts at social control are less subtle than others. There are people in situations that are so crazy-making that the right response is to kick and scream. Why else have so many kids developed oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), the primary symptom of which is hostility to authority? And there are situations where no amount of mental will can stop one's spirit's from wanting to escape. Why else are so many kids committing suicide?

So in the world as it is, people will be excused for preferring to be ill rather than lazy and worthless. And parents will be forgiven for wanting our children to be called disabled instead of bad, for emphasizing their weaknesses when their strengths could lead people to deny their real differences. But it still feels like failure.

The antidote, you suggest, is placing many of these differences within the realm of human experience. I wholly agree this is the task. And we are so far from there. How do people acquire legitimacy when every attempt to articulate their reality walks headlong into some ready-made storyline that delivers stigma. Even a diagnosis can't stop people from telling you to be ashamed.

ALEKS MCHUGH
Regina, SK

THANK YOU Baijayanta Mukhopadhyay for sharing and for giving me a bit of faith. When I was 19 years old I met with a physician here in northern Ontario and

"It's quite easy to be depressed when you're lonely and the world seems mad."

in under three minutes it was recommended that I take antidepressants. I wasn't sleeping well, had stomach issues, etc.; I'm sure I met the criteria. Really, I was having a tough time with "the big questions" ... so, yes, you could say that I was experiencing depression. I felt that the world (and my place in it) was not what I had imagined: it was gut-wrenchingly worse. Still, I thought, "since when do we medicate angst-ridden teenagers for no good reason?" Looking back now, I know that I simply needed like-minded people with whom I could have philosophical conversations with.

Living in rural northern Ontario and reading the work of Foucault didn't lend well to finding my niche, and it's quite easy to be depressed when you're lonely and the world seems mad. Anyhow, that is one small example out of many that I could provide as reasons for my lack of faith in the mental health side of our medical system. I just want to thank you for your openness, honesty, and willingness to speak outside of the norm.

LINDSAY
Northern Ontario

THANK YOU Dr. Mukhopadhyay for making the case that human diversity is not necessarily an illness but rather a positive input to society. People who see the world differently are to be cherished as seekers of a truth that has been suppressed by the vested interests of corporate greed. The main thing that I remember from my studies of psychology in India was that there is "deviancy" as a medical condition and "deviancy" as a social construct.

Thanks again for your insightful writing.

MAYA KHANKHOJE
Montreal, QC

> "Something similar is at play with the epidemic of ADHD and other childhood maladies. If your child can't conform to the school's rules and routines, they are either impaired or they are bad. If it is not their brain, then it's a choice. Of course, no one can show you the line in a person's body or soul between can't and won't conform."

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Disability, dignity, and joy

YOUR March/April 2014 editorial ("mongoloid") was provocative and prescient.

It was provocative because your late brother reminded me of my late aunt, born 50 years earlier. Encephalitis at age eight ended Nellie's formal schooling. Her parents then kept her at home. After they died, my dad, who was her brother, and my mom kept Nellie in our house in rural Alberta. When I was 13, Alberta Hospital in Edmonton accepted Nellie. She spent her last 11 years there and died there in 1985, at age 61.

In the 1980s, my older brother said that, born later, Nellie would be "trainable mentally handicapped" and therefore would reach more of her potential.

Around the same time, my older sister said that when she invited her little friends over to play in the 1950s, they would marvel at Nellie. "I thought every family had a Nellie," my sister said. Her friends rarely came back.

I remember Nellie insisting on her own chair for watching television, blurting out outrageous statements at the dinner table, and hammering away on her old black Underwood typewriter. She would write to JFK, Lester B. Pearson, and other leaders, give the letters to my dad to mail, and he would stash them away or discard them.

When my younger sister and I went through our parents' stuff years after their deaths, we found some of Nellie's letters written in pencil. I remember the musty smell of her bedroom in our house on an acreage north of Edson, AB.

I found your editorial prescient, not only because my spouse has juvenile rheumatoid arthritis and our daughter has cerebral palsy, but also because you oppose the trend toward mere monetary cost-effectiveness in servicing the challenged. That trend ends in Hitler gassing the disabled. What about human cost-effectiveness? My dad talked of "the thin edge of the wedge" of arguments that undermine humanity. Dad was in the Royal Canadian Navy escorting supply ships and chasing U-boats in the North Atlantic during the Second World War.

Rather than commodify and therefore undermine humanity, your vision is of "human flourishing." Your brother, my aunt, my spouse, my daughter: all can flourish in a society that values their humanity, that enhances their dignity. We all gain when we stand with the vulnerable. Solidarity breeds joy and action.

I agree with you that we should press for the world we want, not merely defend past gains from current assault.

This issue was even better than most, and each is better than any bourgeois magazine.

The psychiatry, fat, and wheelchair stories would not get into such magazines, richer in money but poorer in ideas than *Briarpatch*. I'll happily pass on this issue, as I pass on all issues here in the mountainous area 500 kilometres north of Vancouver.

I'm glad I've subscribed for 20-odd years. Keep up the good work.

MICHAEL WYNNE
Williams Lake, B.C.

NGO

Flipping the script on disaster

Last November, the Philippines was struck by the strongest typhoon ever to make landfall. From Haiti, activists with their own "PhD in misery" reached out to help Filipinos contend with the militarized Western aid response that so often wrests power from the people.

By Matthew Davidson

Illustration by Emily McGratten

When typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines last fall, Sandra Borgueta could do little but sit in front of her computer and watch. At school in Seoul, South Korea, Borgueta was well out of harm's way, but her family was not. As the Category 5 storm made landfall on November 8, 2013, her hometown of Tacloban was battered by winds that reached speeds over 300 kilometres per hour. The storm surge raised the sea by nearly four metres, and the city, the capital of Leyte province, was submerged one kilometre inland.

No typhoon on record has ever made landfall with greater intensity than Haiyan. An estimated 13 million people were affected by the storm, known as typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, and up to 10,000 people were initially feared dead. The official death toll currently sits at 6,268. Four million people were displaced from their homes and 2.5 million people were in need of food aid following the disaster.

Like Borgueta, I watched from a distance as CNN showed images of waves crashing violently against the shore and then, in the morning light, revealed the destruction left behind. But unlike Borgueta, I watched from a hotel bar in Haiti, a country that is all too familiar with natural disasters and the relief efforts that follow them.

A warning about aid

For many Haitians, the images being broadcast from the southeast Asian country were recognizable. Less than four years earlier, Haiti had been struck by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake. The tremor levelled towns and cities, including the capital of Port-au-Prince, and death toll estimates were as high as 316,000.

"When we heard about what had happened to the Philippines, we immediately had flashbacks to our experience in the earthquake and the numerous hurricanes that have hit Haiti as well," says Louino Robillard. But it wasn't just the downed buildings or the ruined streets that seemed familiar to the Port-au-Prince resident. The 27-year-old, who grew up in Port-au-Prince's notoriously violent neighbourhood of Cité Soleil, also worried about what would befall the Philippines after the storm clouds cleared. "For the first 10 minutes, I hoped that there would be lots of aid for the Philippines. But then I thought about how we needed to warn people about what that aid looked like for us."

Robillard called this solidarity. Others might label it a reclamation of humanity. While Haiti received a tremendous amount of aid after the January 2010 earthquake, the *pèp la*, the people, had little control over how it was implemented. They were excluded from the reconstruction process while foreigners wielded control. As a result, Haitians have organized and offered their solidarity to the people of the Philippines in order to prevent the same thing from happening there.

To feel human

I first met Robi, as Robillard is known, just down the road from the Toussaint Louverture International Airport in a compound belonging to the non-governmental organization Haiti Communitere. In

a sweltering room, nearly two dozen Haitians and foreign development workers were meeting to discuss the typhoon that had just struck the Philippines. Over the din of the small, overworked air-conditioning unit, the group was discussing what they could do to aid those impacted by the super typhoon.

"What's important is that the people in the Philippines continue to feel human," noted Robillard. "It didn't feel that way for us after the earthquake."

He later elaborated. "In the first few days after the earthquake, I saw a level of solidarity [that] I had never before seen among my people: I saw strangers sharing bread, water, sleeping spaces, and working tirelessly to remove people from the rubble who they did not even know." But Robi said that all stopped once the international aid came. Though the foreign assistance was necessary and appreciated, "the longer the relief process went on, the more divided we became, the more cynical we became of the relief agencies, and the more we felt invisible."

"The longer the relief process went on, the more divided we became."

It was not just that thousands of Haitians were living in squalid camps, a quarter of which were without toilets and even more without safe drinking water a year after the earthquake, or that journalists and development organizations portrayed Haitians as abject victims. It was the Haitians' inability to direct their own recovery. As Robi noted, "We are more than poor, helpless victims, but we are not treated as such and are not given agency toward our own development." For Haitians, exclusion came as part of the aid package.

Humanitarian dispossession

Social exclusion, *moun endeyó*, is a pervasive problem in Haiti. Of all the countries in the Americas, inequality is the starkest there. By 2007, 47 per cent of the national income was appropriated by the richest 10 per cent of the population, with the top two per cent controlling 26 per cent of the wealth in the country. Meanwhile, only 1.1 per cent of the national income belonged to the poorest 20 per cent of the population. More than three-quarters of Haitians lived on less than $2 a day, and the poor majority have almost always been barred from decision-making structures. This continued to be the case post-quake as countries like Canada and the United States pursued an aid plan that effectively disenfranchised the people it was meant to help.

Treating the earthquake survivors as a security threat, soldiers were initially prioritized over food, water, and medical care. Canada's first response was to send two naval ships, the HMCS Halifax and the HMCS Athabaskan, to bring relief to Haiti. But their fundamental mission, according to Cmdr. Josée Kurtz of the HMCS Halifax, was to provide "security and stability." During a speaking tour a few months after the five-week deployment ended, Kurtz was quoted in *Haïti Liberté* as saying: "We didn't provide care in the beginning. Our first task was to secure order." The ships, the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* reported at the time, weren't even loaded with relief supplies. Likewise, Canada chose not to send the highly trained heavy urban search and rescue team, despite the clear need for it, opting to send soldiers instead. The Americans responded in a similar manner.

The relief efforts in the Philippines appeared to begin in the same way. Between clips of Rob Ford – yes, even in Haiti I couldn't escape the news about the Toronto mayor's drug use – reports of looting and images of U.S. soldiers seemed to dominate the coverage. Over 5,000 American troops were deployed to the Philippines, leading activists there to decry a creeping militarization under the guise of aid.

In an article titled "Fear and Loathing in Haiti," geographer Beverley Mullings and her co-authors called this "humanitarian dispossession." They argued that governments adopted a "calculated stance that reflected a greater urge to contain and control the Haitian population than to honour and prioritize their right to life with dignity and self-determination."

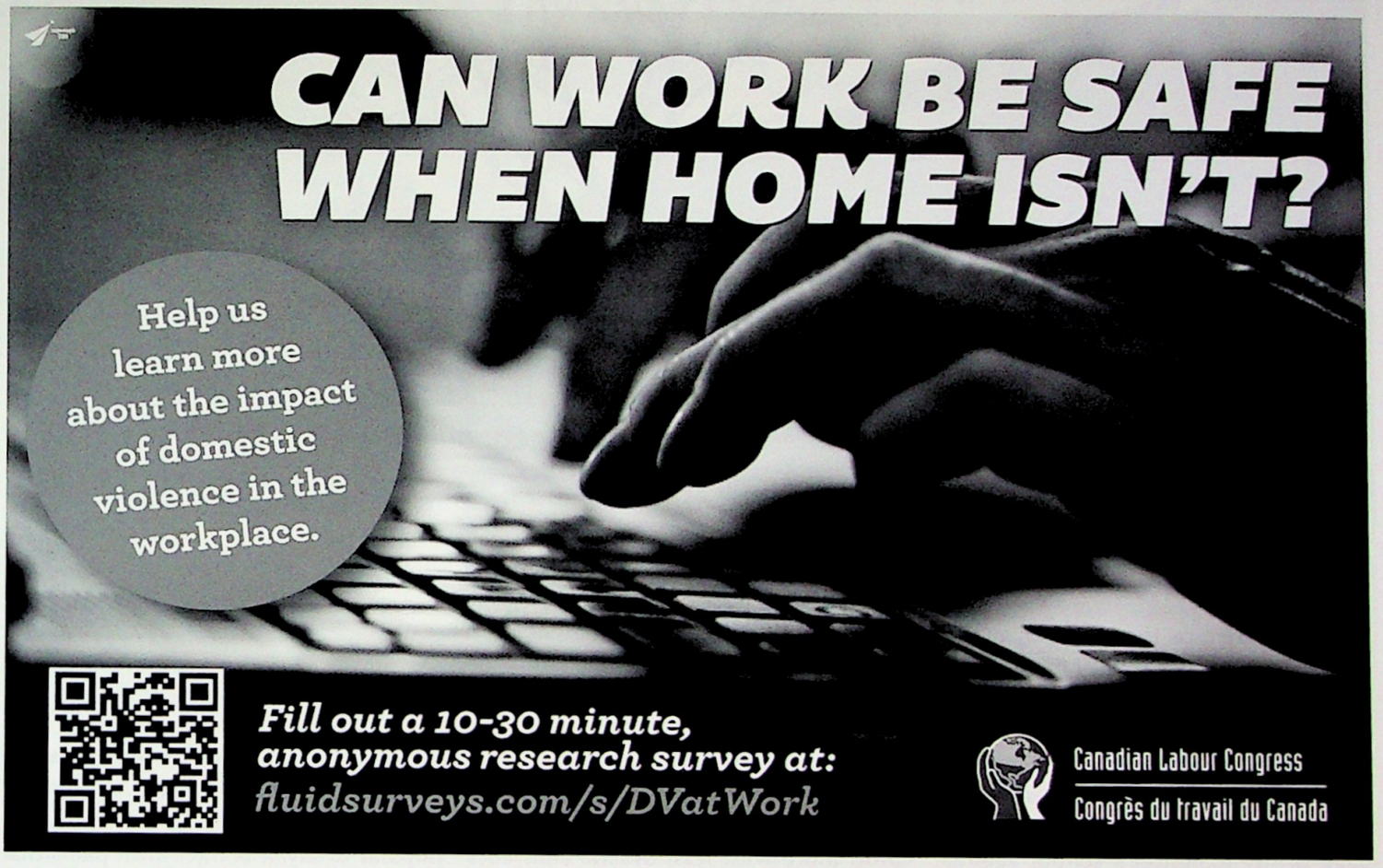
That dispossession and control carried out in the militarized response was sometimes highly visible. The recovery efforts, for example, were coordinated behind the high walls and barbed wire of the United Nations "Log Base" in Port-au-Prince, a place really only accessible to foreign aid workers. The image is provocative: armed soldiers standing behind barricades keeping representatives of the poor, black masses out of the meetings where mostly white foreigners plotted the country's recovery. But it wasn't just because of the soldiers that Haitians were excluded. Less than one per cent of the emergency funds had been directed to the Haitian state. Instead, most of the money had gone to the thousands of NGOs that flooded into Haiti after the earthquake shattered the country, an occurrence likened to an invasion.

"Do not let the typhoon define you."

As Haitians were left without a semblance of democratic control over how the aid dollars would be spent, foreign organizations dominated the relief process. According to researcher Kevin Edmonds, "Haiti has the most privatized social-service sector in the Americas, with some 80 per cent of the country's basic services provided by the private sector through NGOs." The country has been described as having a non-governmental government.

Flipping the script on aid

The way that the aid effort unfolded impacted many Haitians. "Many of our compatriots have sadly begun to accept that we have no agency and should be waiting around for international help," Robi lamented to me. It's a sad sign of what happens when a country is stripped



of its humanity in the name of aid, but it's also one of the reasons why Haitian earthquake survivors are organizing to support Filipinos. "If we can offer this," says Robi, "we are proving to the world that Haitians are not merely the victims of disasters." I might add that they are also proving it to themselves.

"Aid is often thought of as something that the richer countries send to the poorer ones," Robi observes. However, it might actually be the poor countries that are the experts when it comes to disasters. As a young man named Winter joked at the meeting at Haiti Communitere: "We have a PhD in misery. We Haitians can relate to the disaster victims in a way that the humanitarian workers never can."

That would sound right to Borgueta. As she waited for news about her family, who thankfully survived the storm, it was Haitians she talked to. One of her best friends, she says, is Haitian. "I would go off saying that my hometown was inundated, there was no food, and people were becoming violent. A regular person would probably hold a straight face and not know what to say, but with them I got nods and 'yeah that happened back home too.' And it was somewhat comforting."

Taking a lead from the Haitian earthquake survivors, the founder of Haiti Communitere travelled to the Philippines to establish a sister organization there, called Philippines Communitere. For now the organization is working to pass on the lessons learned in Haiti while also facilitating communication between the international aid agencies and local social movements. Over the long term though, there are hopes that Haitians can also travel to the Philippines to share their experiences and help the disaster survivors navigate the aid process.

80 per cent of Haiti's basic services are provided by the private sector through NGOs.

But for Robi, there was no time to wait. In a beautifully written open letter to Filipino typhoon survivors, Robi penned some words of advice for people like Borgueta and others who were impacted by typhoon Haiyan and the ensuing aid response. He wrote:

"My friends, stay strong. Stay together.

Understand that, in the end, your Filipino brothers and sisters are all you have. Organize yourselves and make your priorities clear to the people coming to help you. Do not stay as victims forever and do not let the typhoon define you – you are more than the disaster that hit you. You are not simply beneficiaries of aid – you are the ones who will rebuild your country. You as a people will define what the Philippines' future will look like, and the people who come to help you should be honoured to be participants in *your* vision." ●

The neoliberal education mash-up

What do open plan schools, standardized testing, and public-private partnerships have in common? As the corporate assault on public infrastructure rolls on, Aleksandra McHugh *investigates the forces driving school reform today. Can coordinated resistance across Canada save local schools and keep education in the hands of teachers, students, and communities?*

"Buildings are nice, the environment's important, but more important than that is a sense of autonomy ... [that] people at that school have a sense that they're in control of their destiny."

-- Randall Fielding, Fielding Nair International

Stay active and healthy. Exercise my heart. Move my muscles. Play outside. These exhortations line every other page of my daughter's school agenda. While the virtues of exercise and play need no elaboration, what is odd about this messaging from the Regina Public Schools board is that it comes at a time when so many walkable neighbourhood schools are being shuttered as part of a 10-year "renewal" that began in 2007.

Schooling is thick with plans that run at cross purposes.

The real message: being active is an individual choice, even when children are increasingly forced to spend their before- and after-school hours trapped in cars and buses.

This concrete absurdity reveals a city caught up in the global rush to rationalize schools along neoliberal lines. In districts as dissimilar as Cape Town, Chicago, and rural Nova Scotia, governments have deployed the same logic to eliminate "underutilized" schools. Lessons in efficiency, taken from the world of corporate finance, are passed down from higher to lower levels of government, with responsibility for success falling on those on the receiving end. It is the real trickle-down.

Given the mandate for school boards to do more with less, drastic staff cuts often follow school closures and mergers. As of 2013, Saskatchewan public schools would have needed to create more than 700 full-time education assistant positions simply to equal 2007 levels of classroom support. Combine fewer staff members and climbing numbers of students with intensive needs and you have stressed schools, teachers, and families.

To pursue this austerity agenda, officials have had to ignore research linking frequent school changes with poor social and educational outcomes. School closures compound the pervasive instabilities of poverty, precarious work, and scarce and substandard housing that are prosperity's backdrop.

As the only accessible decision makers, the Regina Public Schools board has had to deflect concerted resistance from parents and the community group RealRenewal who, throughout the consultation process, have put forth alternatives, produced studies, and enlisted experts to challenge the assumptions and anticipate the effects of the imposed reforms. But as has become custom, all the important decisions were already made.

Even if schooling is not broken, as it is popular to say, it is thick with plans that run at cross purposes. Take the clash of two other far-reaching trends now converging in Saskatchewan: open plan schools and standardized testing.

Cells and bells

The statement endorsing local autonomy at the top of this article would be unremarkable if not for its source. Randall Fielding co-heads the design and planning firm Fielding Nair International (FNI), a global pioneer in the current wave of open plan schools. Among its school projects in 30 countries, FNI has designed open plan facilities in Regina and Vancouver, with many more planned for Saskatchewan, Alberta, and B.C.

Envisioned as a break from what Fielding calls the "cells and bells" model of the enclosed classroom, the firm's designs take guidance from progressive educators such as Deborah Meier, founder of the small schools movement, and Alfie Kohn, the foremost critic of standardized testing. Against generic curricula and the corralling of students for an industrial

École Connaught Community School.
Photo: Michael Bell

economy, their designs are meant to encourage critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. Standardized testing, meanwhile, belongs somewhere near the apex of shallow, "degrading" learning, to use Kohn's pun.

Open schools, then, are to be an infrastructure response to educational practice. In a review of open plan schools, both past and present, leading researcher Neil Gislason found their success is entirely reliant on having aligned curriculum and teaching methods, including collaborative teaching and student-directed learning backed by substantial resources and training. Where these were absent, teachers found the layout dysfunctional and took steps to restore the enclosed classroom.

So the open plan can work, but it is experimental and requires a serious commitment to expanded resources and training. Gislason fears the "amnesiac silence" regarding past problems with the open plan model bodes poorly for the current wave of such schools.

FNI's ultimate vision, in any case, is to de-school: to "dissolve schools" in favour of "learning cities, learning communities ... where you blur the boundaries between institutions – universities, K-12 schools, and residences." This radical reconception doesn't come with the multi-million dollar buildings that are FNI's core product, however.

The Saskatchewan Party government, now scrambling to cope with a population influx, has committed to building nine joint-use schools through the public-private partnership (P3) model at a cost upwards of $420 million, with construction for all nine facilities bundled into one tender.

The building designs are meant to encourage critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity.

In the space of six years, Saskatchewan has gone from closing "underutilized" schools to joining Canada's "infrastructure gap." This while sound buildings lie vacant, their outstanding repairs worth a fraction of the new builds. Regina's oldest school, the 100-year-old École Connaught Community School, is marked for teardown, with the school board itself blocking RealRenewal's every effort to conduct a thorough structural assessment of the historic building.

Efficiency, then, is not the answer to the riddle of what drives school reform.

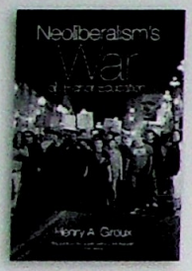
A standardized racket

Standardized testing is also not cheap. The initial phase of implementation in this province alone was slated to cost $5.9 million.

A bit late to join the Texas-inspired testing craze that is now losing favour in Alberta, Ontario, and even Texas, in April the Saskatchewan government succumbed to public pressure, retreating from former Education minister Russ Marchuk's call for standardized tests as the fix for high dropout rates among Indigenous students. These system-wide generic tests are in fact notorious for their cultural bias. While the tests assume a homogenous student population, factors like poverty, disability, and cultural difference are masked as performance failure.

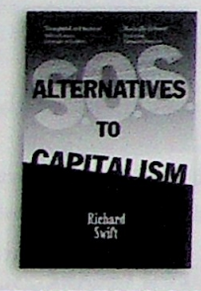
Instead of pulling youth in, "standardized tests marginalize and push them out," says University of Regina education professor Marc Spooner. Further, such tests are a blunt instrument. The reality, says

Resist the neoliberal agenda!



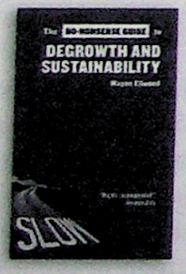
NEOLIBERALISM'S WAR ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Henry Giroux

"Anybody who is remotely interested in the plight of future generations must read this book." — **Dr. Brad Evans**, Director, *Histories of Violence* website



SOS: ALTERNATIVES TO CAPITALISM
Richard Swift

"A genuine invitation to both dream and recover from a nightmare."
— **Federico Demaria**, *Research & Degrowth*



THE NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO DEGROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY
Wayne Ellwood

"Books like this get us started in our thinking and our actions." — **Dr. David Suzuki**

BTL

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Spooner, is that "they do not know what they are measuring." Low scores might indicate a large class size or a teacher who spends more time facilitating real learning than "teaching to the test."

In fact, study after study has shown that variations in test scores have little to do with quality of instruction and everything to do with income inequality, levels of parent education, and neighbourhood demographics. Even where scores are high, the tests reflect lower level thinking and shallow, rote learning.

But they are not without effects in the classroom. They do restrict teachers' freedom to adapt curriculum for their students. And they do succeed in driving competition. In this way, they resonate with market logic, pitting students, teachers, and schools against each other and turning students who do not thrive by such narrow measures into a liability for group success.

Combining this shallow test-driven model of education with FNI's open plan buildings, meanwhile, is simply incoherent.

Consolidating control

If the preference for open plan schools does not arise from any commitment to progressive education or what FNI bills as "democratic architecture," what is it about?

Part of the answer is curb appeal: we want to join the ranks of 21st-century global cities. But we also want to pry open public infrastructure (worth an estimated $500-600 billion nationally) for private profit, while appearing to balance budgets. The privatization of public assets is a hallmark of the present era of capital accumulation, part of a process renowned geographer David Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession."

Closing schools takes decades of neglected repairs off the public books, while the new facilities are financed by future debt with annual lease payments for their use. It is all very creative, coupling the gloss of future-forward facilities with the crisis created by closing existing schools.

While, broadly speaking, the infrastructure gap is real, it too is engineered to the extent that federal infrastructure spending (relative to GDP) went from being two to three per cent in the 1960s and '70s to just 1.5 per cent by 2000. Following the brief stimulus to reboot infrastructure spending, the Conservatives continued to ramp down public investment. Their 2013 economic plan further mandated that all federal funding for projects over $100 million be conditional on a P3 screen. The screen is carried out by PPPP Canada, a Crown corporation dedicated to promoting this very model to municipalities, provinces, territories, and First Nations reserves.

Not the rude privatization of the 1980s, P3s introduce variations on the drive to expand markets and raise profit margins. The softer sell partnerships give negotiators room to work out the preferred mix of private design, construction, financing, operation, and maintenance of services. In this way, infrastructure has served as a crucial inroad to solidify a neoliberal mode of governance that seeks to dissolve unions and reduce workplace standards.

Formed in 1993, the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships (CCPPP) is now an influential lobby that draws its 1,200 members from all fields with a stake in P3s: international financiers, lawyers, and construction consortia, along with current and former elected officials. Elites float easily between roles. A keynote speaker at a CCPPP annual conference is as likely to be Kathleen Wynne, premier of Ontario, as it is to be Jin-Yong Cai, CEO of the International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, whose business is to privatize public assets in developing countries.

P3s are said to strike a bargain where risk is transferred to private companies who, in exchange, receive a better return on investment. The reality is that when P3s have left a trail of corruption and failure the cost is always shouldered by the public that pays for and depends on the services.

Marc Spooner has said that standardized testing "makes the most sense the further you are away from the classroom and students." This is where the odd mash-up of current education ini-

tiatives finds common purpose: in their antipathy to local control and collective participation.

While there are limited avenues to provide feedback to elected officials and bureaucrats and to hold them to account, such avenues are virtually non-existent when it comes to private corporations. The private firms eager to build, finance, and maintain our children's schools are not subject to democratic mechanisms, such as Canada's Access to Information Act. Their ownership is easily dissolved or transferred, their executives rarely held personally accountable.

Educated and pushing back

In April, concerted pressure and broad mobilization by communities and teachers in Saskatchewan paid off. Education Minister Don Morgan announced that the province was scrapping its plans for large-scale standardized testing. "I don't think it benefits the students and I don't think it benefits the province," said Morgan. The pushback was so successful the minister admitted that the term "standardized testing" has "become absolutely toxic" in the province.

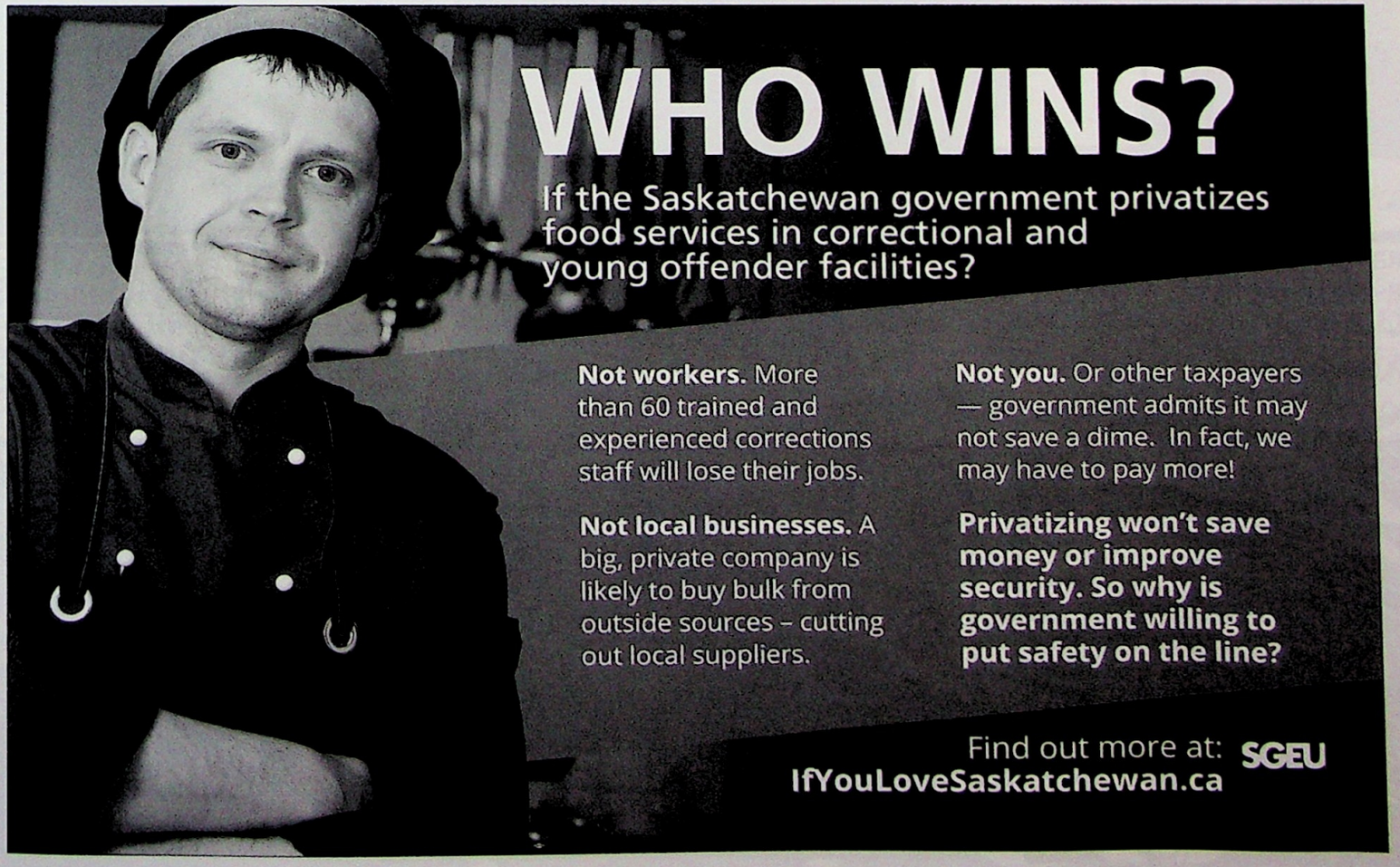
P3s may be a harder target, however. Dedicated government departments and enabling legislation have entrenched this project delivery method, and P3s have become a worldwide benchmark practice in infrastructure investment.

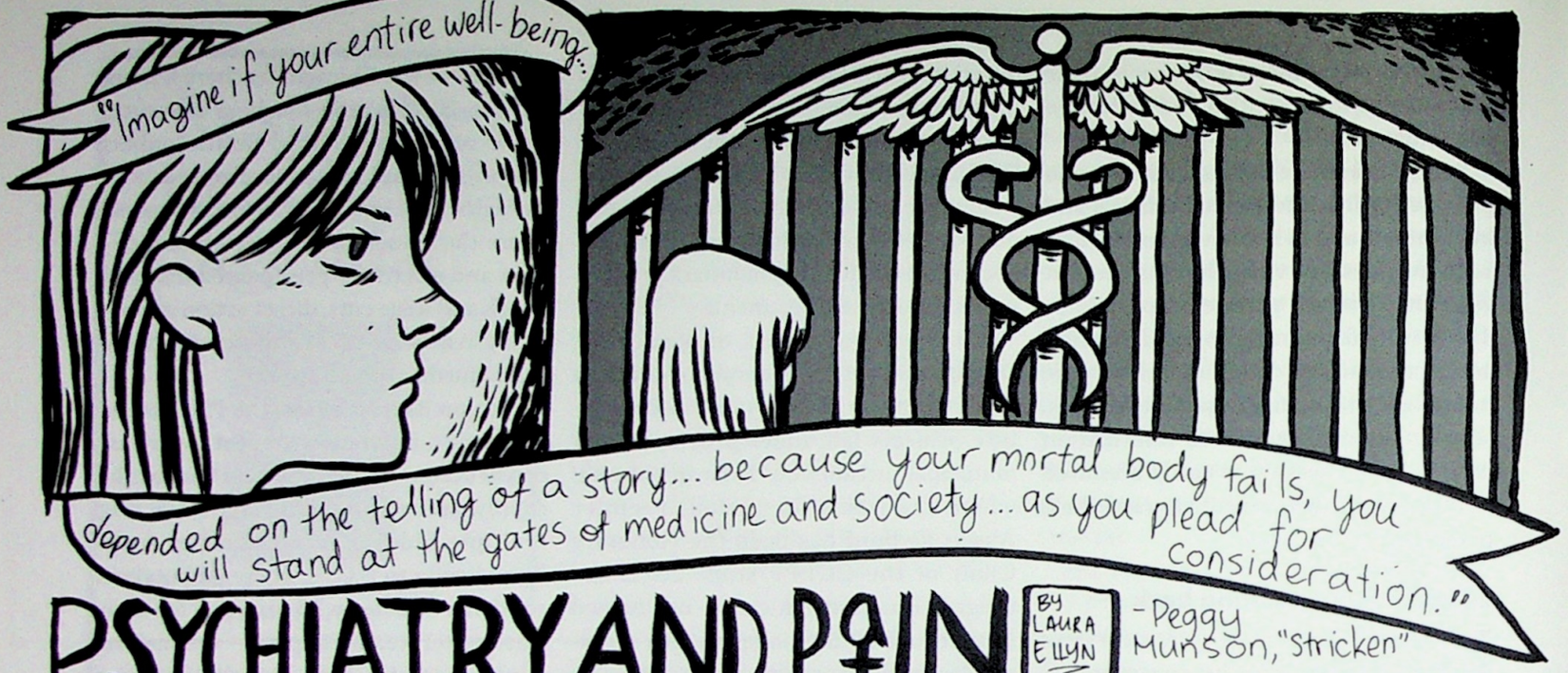
But there are points of weakness. Despite the fact the federal government holds the purse strings, most infrastructure projects fall under provincial and municipal jurisdiction. Even in Alberta, where the (recently ousted) Premier Alison Redford has been the Honorary Chair of the CCPPP since 2012, the Calgary Board of Education has turned away from P3 builds in favour of a standard design-build process, citing untenable delays in construction. In Saskatoon and Regina, communities have mobilized to force school boards to adopt motions demanding provincial accountability and transparency with respect to P3 plans.

Such efforts form part of a growing resistance to neoliberal school reform that can draw strength from the rank-and-file militancy of the Chicago Teachers Union and the 2013 Seattle teachers' boycott, which successfully forced Seattle public schools to abandon standardized tests at the high school level. In 2003 in El Salvador, where the P3 sell-off of telecommunications and electricity precipitated massive layoffs and wage cuts, direct action culminating in massive street protests effectively halted further privatization.

Even on its own terms, the P3 boom is acquiring a reputation for cost overruns, construction delays, corruption, bankruptcy, and routine difficulty attracting multiple bidders. Communities from Nova Scotia to B.C. – where Abbotsford residents defeated a P3 proposal for their wastewater treatment plant – are making connections to share findings and arm themselves with facts to push back against the P3 agenda.

The stakes are high. If this opposition is not successful, not only the fate of schools but also those of roads, prisons, hospitals, social services, pensions, transit, energy, and water could be in the offing. The sky could be no limit.

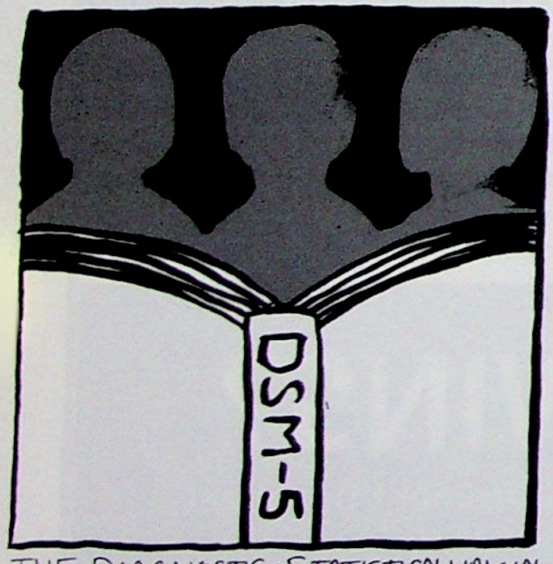




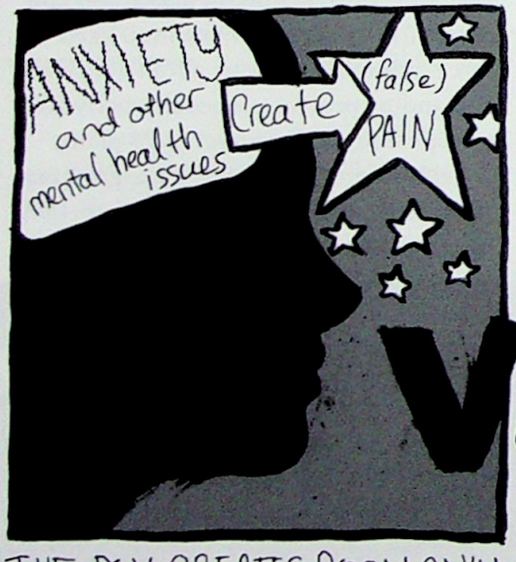
PSYCHIATRY AND PAIN

BY LAURA ELLYN

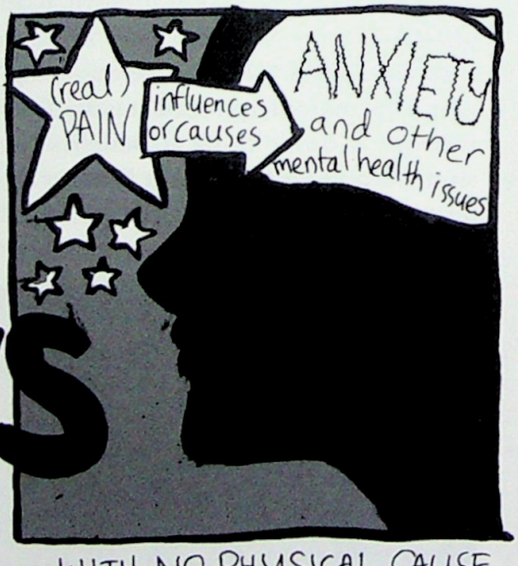
- Peggy Munson, "stricken"



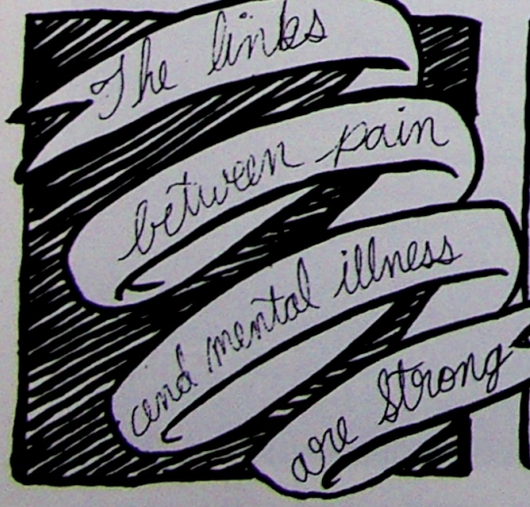
THE DIAGNOSTIC+STATISTICAL MANUAL HAS BEEN UPDATED AGAIN, EXPANDING SOME DEFINITIONS AND NARROWING OTHERS IN ITS CONSTANT EVOLUTION.



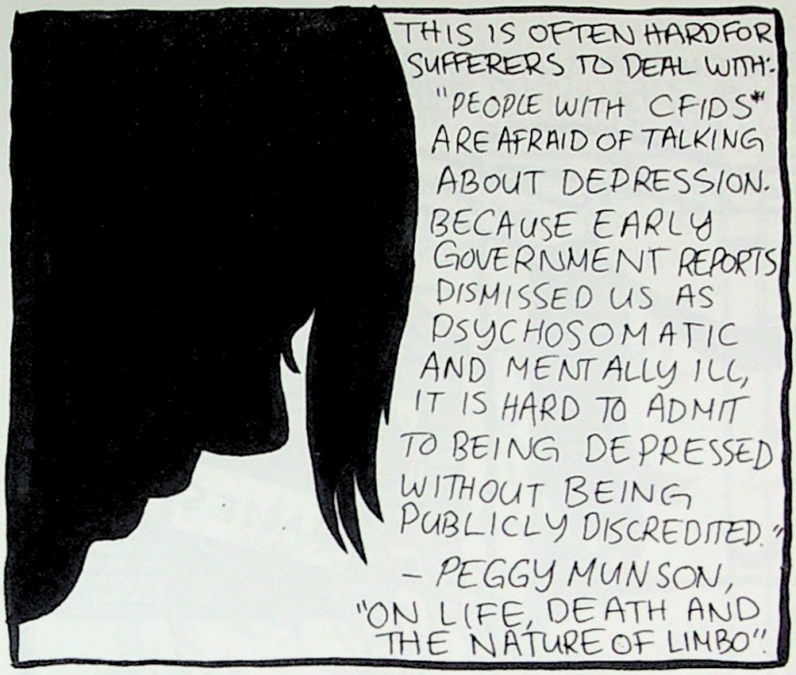
THE DSM CREATES ROOM ONLY FOR THE FREUDIAN THEORY OF TRANSFERENCE — THE IDEA THAT PAIN IS "ALL IN YOUR HEAD", THAT ANXIETY CAN MANIFEST PAIN...



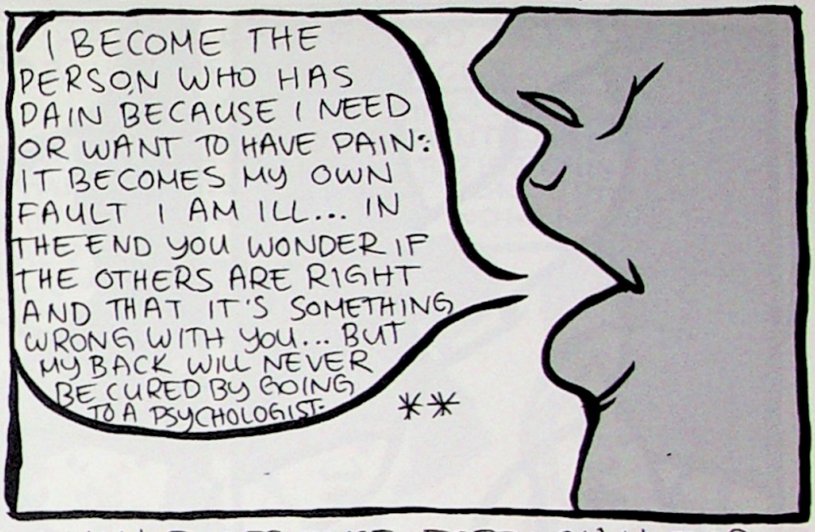
...WITH NO PHYSICAL CAUSE. NOWHERE IN THE DSM-5 IS REPRESENTED THE IDEA THAT CHRONIC PAIN (WITH A PHYSICAL ORIGIN) CAN AUGMENT OR EVEN CAUSE ANXIETY.



STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT DEALING WITH CHRONIC PAIN ON A LONG-TERM BASIS CAN *LEAD TO* A NUMBER OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS:



CFIDS IS ONE OF MANY CHRONIC ILLNESSES WHERE SUFFERERS FACE MISDIAGNOSIS OR OUTRIGHT DISMISSAL OF SYMPTOMS AS PSYCHOSOMATIC.



THIS PROVES TO BE A RELATIVELY COMMON EXPERIENCE, ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN.

The treatment of pain and mental illness is highly gendered.

*CHRONIC FATIGUE IMMUNE DYSFUNCTION SYNDROME.
** A. WERNER ET AL. / SOCIAL SCIENCES and MEDICINE 59 (2004) 1035-1045

IT IS NOT HARD TO SEE THAT MUCH OF THE MEDICAL APPROACH TO CHRONIC PAIN & MENTAL ILLNESS IS ROOTED IN MISOGYNY.

IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT THIS MISOGYNY EXTENDS TO OTHER AREAS OF CHRONICALLY & MENTALLY ILL WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES.

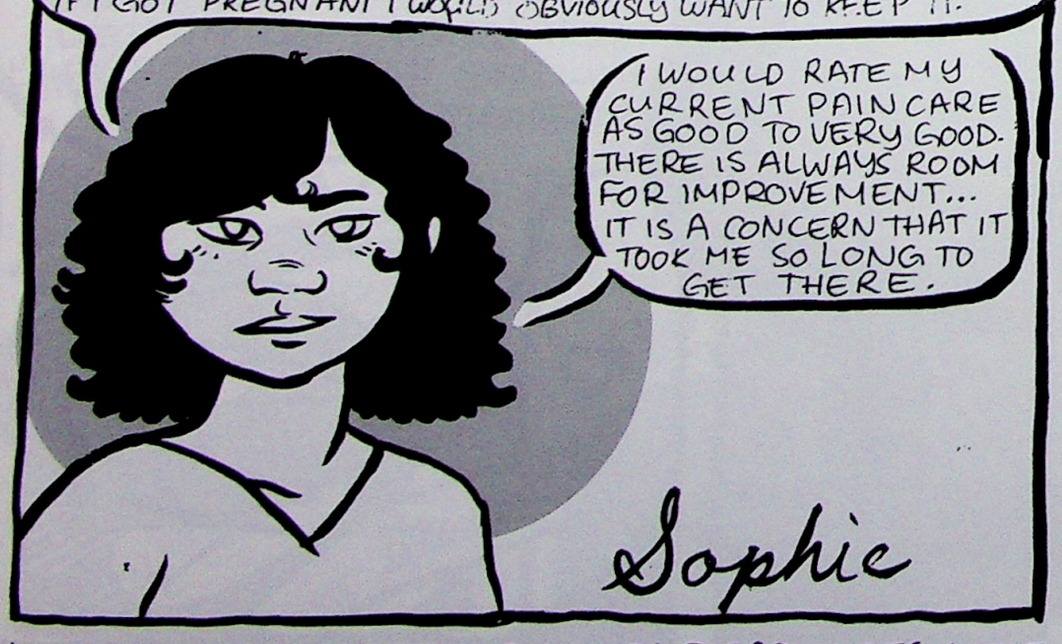
Some Statistics:

WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AND/OR CHRONIC ILLNESS ARE BETWEEN 50 AND 100% MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THAN ABLED & NEUROTYPICAL WOMEN.

MANY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTERS ARE NOT EQUIPPED TO HOUSE WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AND CHRONIC ILLNESS ***

This is not to say that experiences of healthcare aren't disparate but there are undeniable common threads

FOR ME, GENDER AND MENTAL HEALTH INTERSECTED A LOT IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE TO AFFECT MY TREATMENT. ... MY PHARMACIST STRONGLY DISCOURAGED ME FROM TAKING MEDICATION BECAUSE 'IF I GOT PREGNANT IT WOULD KILL MY BABY'. HE ASSUMED THAT AS A TEENAGE NATIVE GIRL, I WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE HAVING SEX... AND IF I GOT PREGNANT I WOULD OBVIOUSLY WANT TO KEEP IT.



Sophie

I AM GENERALLY, EVEN WHEN BADLY SICK, QUIET & POLITE... THEY VERY MUCH PERCIEVED THE LOUD/TROUBLEMAKING KIDS AS NEEDING HELP AND ASSUMED THAT BECAUSE I DIDN'T MAKE TROUBLE I WASN'T VERY SICK.

Alex

*** VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES: VIOLENCE PREVENTION REVIEW, VECOVA CENTRE FOR DISABILITIES AND RESEARCH, 2011

MANY WOMEN PATIENTS FEEL THAT IF THEY MAKE TOO MUCH TROUBLE, THEY WILL ALIENATE HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY STRUGGLE TO COMMUNICATE THE SERIOUS NATURE OF THEIR CONDITIONS.

I WENT THROUGH SEVERAL DOCTORS ... AND HEAVEN FORBID YOU GET A REPUTATION AS A PROBLEM PATIENT!

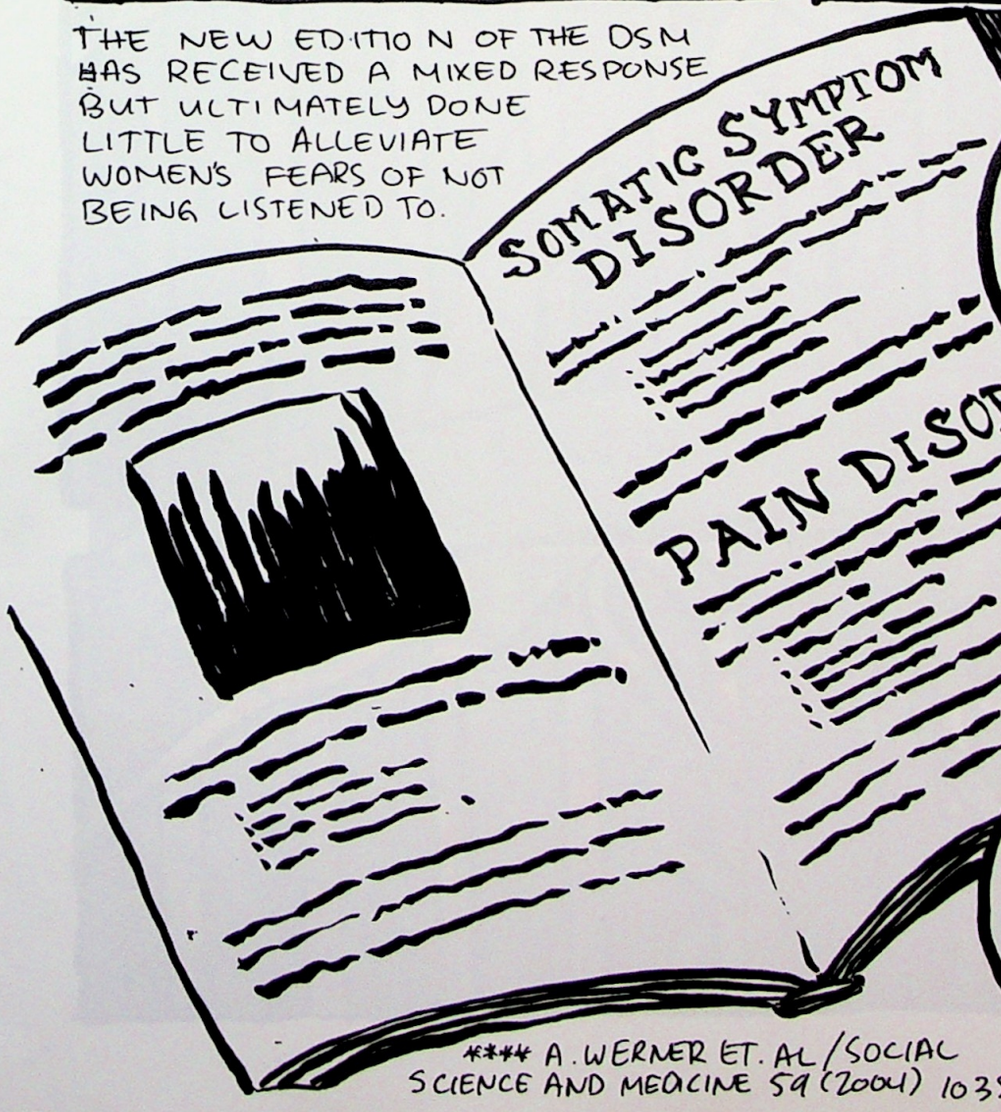
Serena

IT IS HARD FOR WOMEN TO TALK ABOUT THEIR ILLNESS EXPERIENCES.

"'WHINING AND COMPLAINING' IS A SUBJECT THAT RECURS IN DIFFERENT GUISES IN THE INFORMANTS' ILLNESS STORIES, CHIEFLY WHEN THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT CONCEPTIONS OR ENCOUNTERS WITH OTHER WOMEN..." ****

THE NEED TO NOT BE SEEN AS "THE KIND OF WOMAN WHO COMPLAINS ABOUT EVERYTHING" TIES STRONGLY INTO THE WAYS WOMEN ARE EITHER LISTENED TO OR DISMISSED - WAYS THAT HAVE A LOT TO DO WITH SYSTEMIC SEXISM.

THE NEW EDITION OF THE DSM HAS RECEIVED A MIXED RESPONSE BUT ULTIMATELY DONE LITTLE TO ALLEVIATE WOMEN'S FEARS OF NOT BEING LISTENED TO.



I AM CONCERNED WITH THE INCREASED EMPHASIS ON BIOLOGICAL PSYCHIATRY... I AM CONCERNED WITH THE INCREASED MEDICALIZATION OF INDIVIDUAL VARIATION ... IN THE SENSE THAT INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES WITH NEURODIVERGENCE ARE NOT INVALID BECAUSE THEY DO NOT CONFORM TO A DIAGNOSTIC MARKER.

- Sophie

THE SOMATIC SYMPTOMS DISORDER CRITERIA MAKES ME REALLY NERVOUS... I WORRY DOCTORS WILL DISMISS MY PAIN.

- Lauren

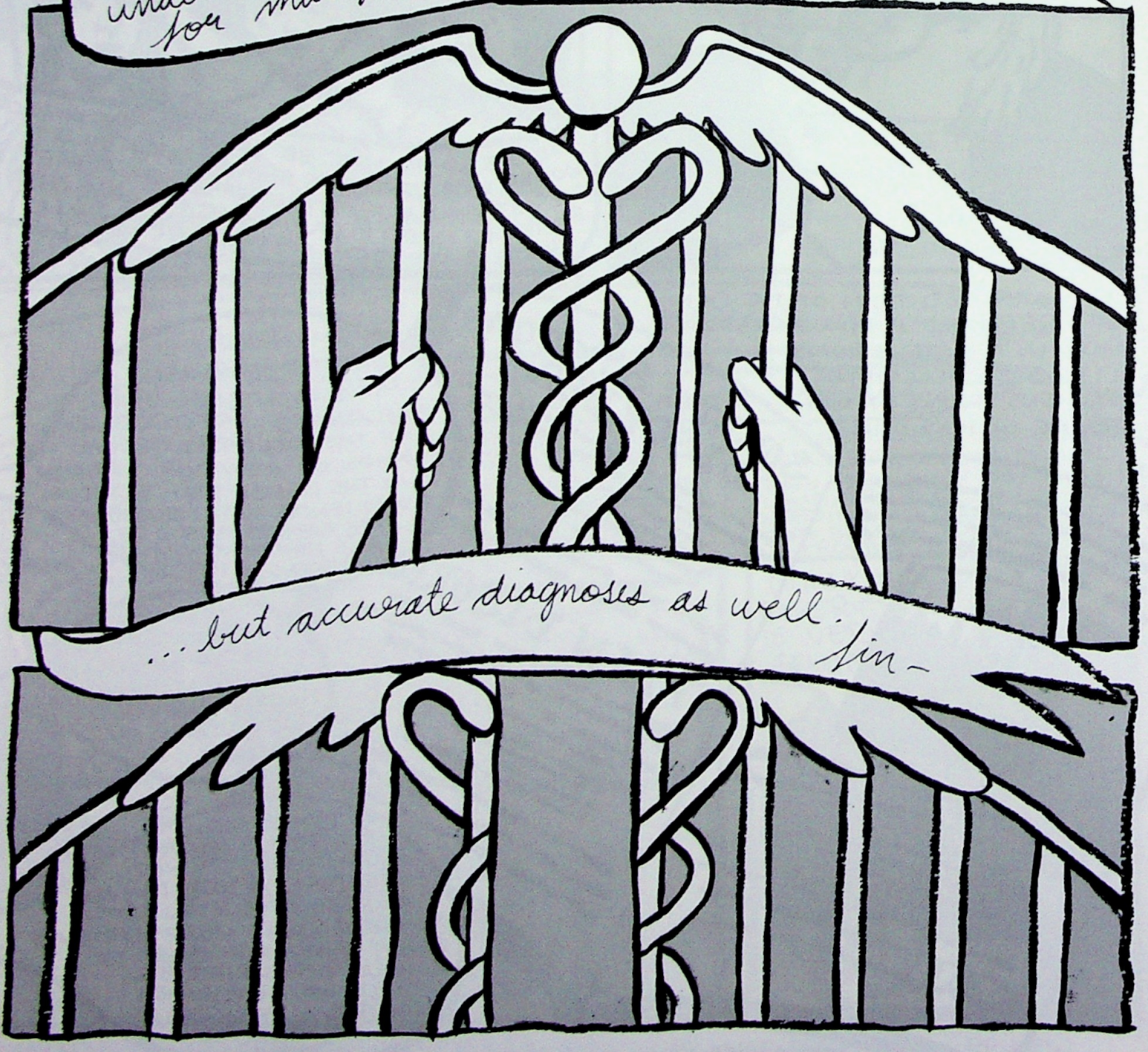
I THINK THE NEW DSM IS DOING PRETTY WELL. I'M NOT SURE THAT DOCTORS PAY ALL THAT MUCH ATTENTION TO IT... MAYBE IF I WAS MORE EXPRESSIVE ABOUT PAIN AND REFUSED TO BEHAVE "APPROPRIATELY"... PEOPLE WOULD ASSUME I WAS ACTUALLY SICK/HURT ... IT'S HARD TO TELL.

- Alex

**** A. WERNER ET. AL / SOCIAL SCIENCE AND MEDICINE 59 (2004) 1035-1045

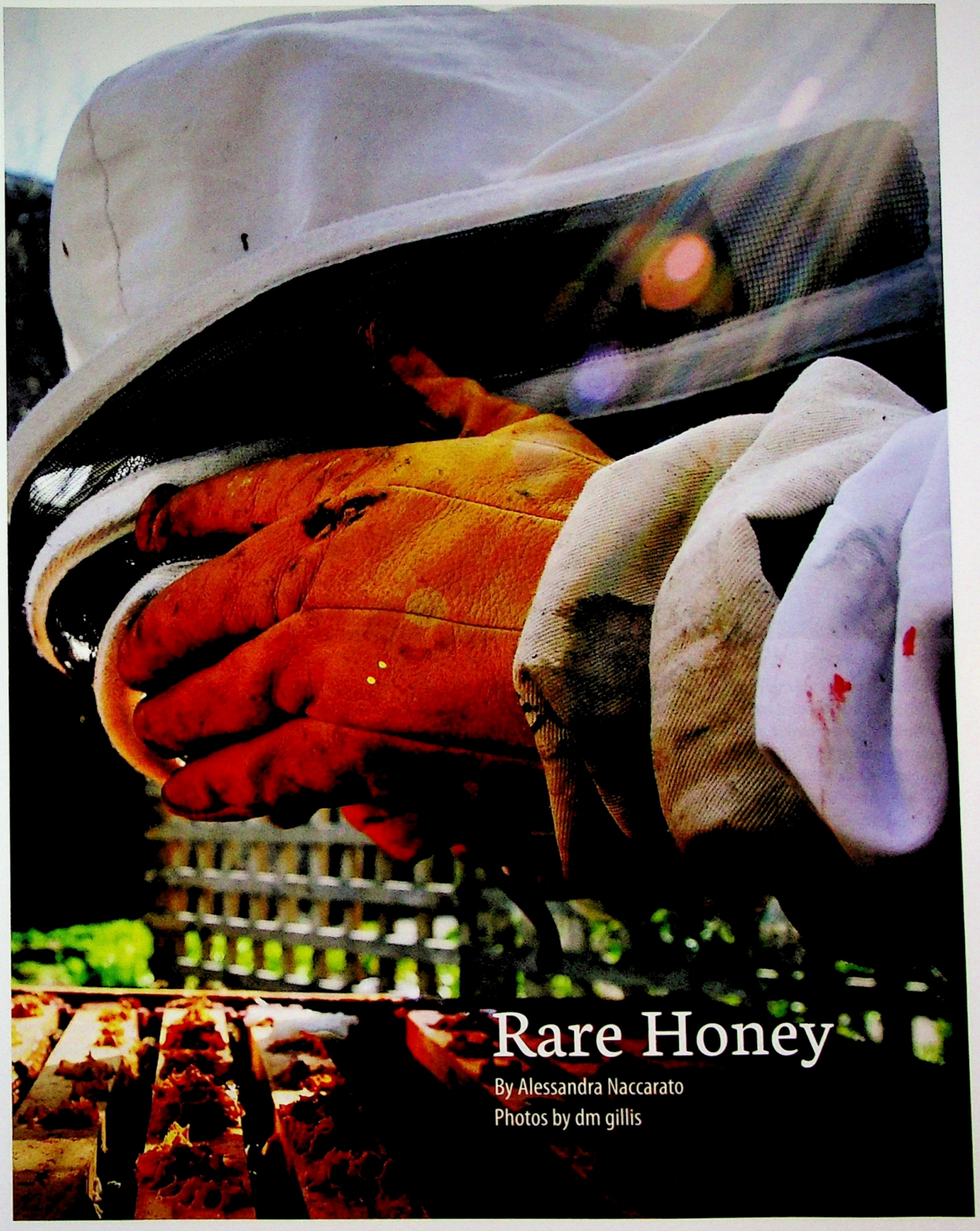
The DSM has a long way to go before the doors to women in healthcare are truly open.

Until then, the situation of women struggling with mental health diagnosis or chronic pain conditions, or both, continues to be a battle to be taken seriously and treated with respect. Expanding our understanding of pain is necessary for many to receive not only that respect...



...but accurate diagnoses as well.

fin-



Rare Honey

By Alessandra Naccarato

Photos by dm gillis

These worker bees are already bringing in pollen and nectar to their inner-city hive in mid-March. The trusty hive tool on the right is always at a keeper's side.

Just a drop of dark honey and the full-bodied flavour, steeped in the comb, takes over your mouth: caramel undertones and thick molasses scent. "You can actually line up the honeys from the neighbourhoods and always know the Hastings honey," Julia Common tells me as I sit with her and her daughter, Sarah Common, in East Van Roasters. "You can taste it. There's a certain flavour that hits you as you get closer to the heart."

The heart is a hive named Elizabeth. It was the first one they set up in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), back in June 2012. They didn't expect it to produce honey but wanted to share the experience of beekeeping, believing it could be "a powerful way to pull people out of their chaos." Against expectation, Elizabeth created 40 litres of honey that summer, twice the amount of Julia's hives on pristine farmland near Tsawwassen. More than that, community members showed a talent for beekeeping and were leading peer workshops in apiculture by September. Today, Hives for Humanity manages 72 hives throughout downtown Vancouver and has a supply of rich, raw honey it sells to sustain the project.

Sarah begins to tell me about the early days of the project. She had the idea after seven years working with the Portland Hotel Society and seeing the therapeutic impact of people getting their hands in soil. But her story is interrupted when I look up and realize Julia is on the verge of tears. "I can't help it," she says as she removes her glasses. Sarah gives me an impish glance and a half-smile as she rubs her mother's shoulder. "I'm just such a doofus," Julia continues. "I didn't want to be down here. Then in the middle of the first summer, we'd just had our first taste of honey. Jim, a volunteer, is looking at the bees and he says, 'Next year, could we make two out of this one?' Of course, he's completely spot on. That's what you do. I ask my daughter, 'Does anyone talk about the future down here? Because I'm talking to Jim about spring.'"

"The bees forced me to go out into the community."

Jim, a peer mentor at the Drug Users Resource Centre, also known as LifeSkills, was the inspiration to expand the project and give it a name. I meet him an hour later in the small community garden behind Vancouver's safe injection facility, InSite. There's nothing blooming in December, but there's still plenty to see: in the south corner, a women's bench with a dedicated plaque and memorials, and at the north end, the bare wood structure of a sweat lodge. "A lot of people are trapped within these three blocks," Jim tells me. "This is the only green space. Respect for it is high."

He moves and speaks gently as he shows me around, speaking about the moods of

Top: Ian Smythe. Bottom: Adding sage to the smoker. Smoke calms the bees and sage is used for its medicinal benefits and its relaxing smell.

the bees, how they recognize the keepers by their scent. He points out where they project movies in the summer against the brick wall of InSite, then finally brings me to the west wall, to Elizabeth, the heart of the network. The hive is unremarkable, a hand-painted box on a stand. But inside, 60,000 bees have joined into a mass at the centre, protecting one another. At least, that's everyone's hope. There's no guarantee the bees will make it through winter.

Some winter die-off is normal. But today, even the most committed, organic beekeepers open their hives in spring and find them barren. Ironically, the bees are more likely to survive in the city than in the countryside. In rural settings, there's no way to protect them from what's happening on neighbouring farms. The three biggest threats are almost always present: genetically modified (GM) plants that can be difficult for the insects to process, monoculture crops that offer only a limited period for pollination, and the use of neonicotinoid pesticides. In fact, cities are the only places where bee populations are steadily increasing. Municipal regulations have been changed from New York to Vancouver to allow people to keep hives in urban centres, and thousands of people are choosing to do so. In the absence of pesticides and GM monoculture crops, honeybees are proving they still have the ability to thrive.

> The evidence connecting neonicotinoids to colony collapse disorder resulted in a ban of the use of these pesticides by the European Union, instituted December 1, 2013. No such ban exists in North America. The Canadian Honey Council, an organization representing 7,000 apiarists, estimates that Canada has lost 35 per cent of its bee population in the last three years.

Later that day, I sit with a man in the main room of LifeSkills. Ian smiles shyly under his worn, red baseball cap. He lives in a single room occupancy suite (SRO) operated by the Portland Hotel Society and got involved in the project when a notice about the arrival of the bees was slipped under his door. Now he's the main caretaker of five hives. "It gives me the sense that I'm actually protecting humanity by protecting the bees," he says quietly, and shrugs. "I'm making sure that there's going to be food and pollination. A little strange, but it means a lot to me."

As the room blossoms around us, filling with loud conversations and laughter, people taking shelter from the cold and doing laundry in the community machines, Ian shifts in his seat and admits he's not the most social person. "I'm not involved in the alcohol or anything, so I didn't really have a reason to go outside. But the bees forced me to go out into the community. Now people see me around and say, 'There goes the bee guy.' I mean, how much alone time does a person really want in their life?" I

Sarah Common, Ian Smythe, and Julia Common in the Hastings Folk Garden, site of the first Hives for Humanity hive in Vancouver's DTES.

nod and laugh gently with him. "Our back deck used to be nothing but people throwing garbage out there," he adds. "Now we've got a garden. People that normally wouldn't say anything to each other are out there together all summer long."

It sounds like Ian is reciting poetry when he describes the bees: how they communicate the source of pollen, its distance and quantity, through a dance performed completely in the dark, how they trust and follow one another, constantly working to a greater purpose. I begin to lose myself in a vision of LifeSkills slowly transforming into an intricate honeycomb that hums as each person performs their own small task: a social worker whistles as he passes, a couple shares noodles from a Styrofoam container while smiling deeply at each other, the dryer tosses sleeping bags, two men laugh. Then Ian looks up at me, the expression on his face changing. "If the human race were structured more like bees, you'd never have a problem in your life knowing where you're suppose to be. As soon as they emerge from their cell, they've got a job to do. If humans were born that way, having everything they needed ..." And the vision, delicate as it was, fades.

The truth is, both communities are living on a precipice. Their resilience doesn't change the fact that they are under threat. Ian routinely scrapes propolis from the hives, grinds it up, and places it in propanol to make liquid bandages. The tincture can treat the bedbug bites he and his neighbours receive living in SROs, but it can't change the housing crisis in Vancouver, the gentrification of the DTES, or the fact that welfare provides only $375 per month for housing. Still, Ian is hopeful. "You know, humans are the most resilient of all creatures," he says as we zip up our jackets and head back out into the cold. "There's no difference between someone living on the street to someone living in a home. It's survival. The guy who lives on the street may become a little harder because he always has to be on his guard. We adapt, just like the bees adapt."

Later that night, I eat the honey with a spoon, letting each mouthful dissolve. The flavour is deep and unexpected. There's no way to separate it from the voices of Ian and Jim now, from that small painted hive and the blue felt hearts I saw woven into the garden fence when I left. I remember the words of Vandana Shiva, whose activism focuses on our rights to seeds: "The beauty of the seed is out of one you can get millions. The beauty of the pollinator is it turns that one into millions and that's an economics of sharing. That's to me the real economics of growth because life is growing." The beauty of the pollinator is the beauty of the beekeeper, I think. And this rare honey, maybe it's just the taste of life growing, wherever and however it can.

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Decolonizing the emergency

The crisis of violence against Indigenous women in Canada includes high levels of domestic violence. In the context of front-line and social services that bring further harm and trauma to Indigenous people, 13 Blackfoot women in southern Alberta participated in a project to decolonize two women's emergency shelters through the practice of Blackfoot shawl-making. This is part of that story.

By Julie Coleman, Emily Lindsay Jackson, Gayle Strikes With A Gun, and Doris Sweet Grass

At front, Julie Coleman, Gayle Strikes With A Gun, and Doris Sweet Grass walk in the Annual Memorial March for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and in support of One Billion Rising for Justice in Pincher Creek, Alberta. Photo: Pincher Creek Voice

Most important, I am worthy, I am alive, and I love being who I am. – Gloria

Candace, Donna, Gloria, Kathryn, and Lisa left the Blackfoot Piikani and Kainai (Blood) reserves on a Sunday. They were making the long road trip from southern Alberta to Winnipeg to the 2013 International Indigenous Voices in Social Work Conference to present a special project to attendees. Finished just weeks earlier, the project involved two emergency shelters these women had used when experiencing domestic violence. We, the project team, had asked them and eight other Blackfoot women to share their experiences and their expertise, to improve shelter services. Through the Blackfoot practice of shawl-making, these women had shared stories of abuse and created a spirit of hope and strength for a life beyond violence.

Now we had asked these women to share their stories and spirit again. Throughout the conference, they were the only project participants in a sea of social work practitioners and academics. Yet they proved to be a magnetic force, attracting people who were curious, friendly, and supportive, making connections everywhere, in the corridors and at mealtimes. By the time of their presentation, people were eager to hear their story.

It is an honour to be here, and it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me to present at a conference such as this. – Lisa

These women's stories make up part of a much larger crisis that has been silenced in Canada: the widespread violence experienced by Indigenous women. Sources including Amnesty International report Indigenous women in Canada are between five and seven times more likely than non-Indigenous women to experience domestic violence – and it is often more serious. Momentum is building for a national inquiry into the estimated 824 missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada

Gloria drumming at the Winnipeg conference.

and for a national action plan on violence against women that would coordinate existing policies and bolster preventative action. These would represent important steps towards raising consciousness, introducing accountability, and, most critically, saving lives. Yet even in a best-case scenario there will remain thousands of traumatized Indigenous women survivors who have lost their children or their homes and experienced the deterioration of their physical and mental health. How can we help the survivors and those still at risk move to the positive future they deserve?

Domestic violence in the colonial present

When I picked out my shawl, I was thinking about my past and abuse I went through. My life was dark and gloomy. – Donna

Our project at the women's shelters privileged both the women's articulation of their needs when experiencing domestic violence and their recommendations for how services on and off reserve can best meet them. Our research methods were Blackfoot shawl-making and participatory appraisal exercises, the latter borrowing heavily from Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy for research with oppressed people. This methodology committed us to meeting the women on their own terms, to generate experiential knowledge that could spur community-based action for improving domestic violence services.

Shawl-making also allowed the women to share their stories and recommendations for domestic violence services in a culturally appropriate way. The Blackfoot have made shawls for centuries to create the sacred attire for ceremony: sweat lodges, pipe ceremonies, night lodges, powwows, and Sun Dances. Designs emerge from meaningful colours and images, connecting the craftsperson or wearer to their community and a shared past.

When I went to the shelter in Pincher Creek, I was going through by far the hardest time of my life. Within a week I had my baby back, and a month later I had my very first home. – Kathryn

The women in our project were very clear that, for them, most domestic violence services are sites of harm and trauma: "dangerous spaces." Among these they named children's services, law enforcement, and health services – all essential, front-line agencies that deal with domestic violence victims. These women shared difficult stories about the degrading and dehumanizing treatment they experienced from service providers.

Twenty-three-year-old Kathryn spoke about child welfare seizing her daughter, just as she was starting a new job and full of hope for the future, and the racism she believes provoked that action. At clinics and hospitals, in the midst of crisis, the women endured staff's assumptions that "they just want pills." Across Canada, police frequently detain or arrest abused Indigenous women rather than provide immediate, appropriate support. As a result, abused Indigenous women do not seek help when needed or, if they do, their victimization is often intensified unnecessarily.

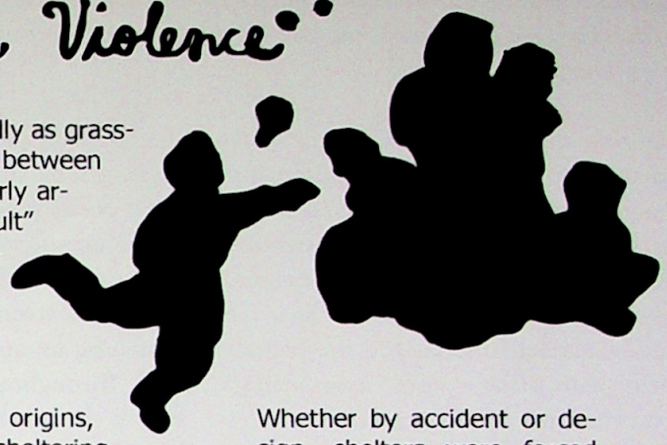
For these women, the exception to dangerous domestic violence services has been emergency shelters. Unemployed, homeless, dealing with a history of abuse and having her baby taken away, Kathryn went to "the safest place [she] could think of, the women's shelter." As Lisa told the audience, "The shelter is here for us, and they never turn us away." Donna said: "I felt safe at the shelter, and I was able to leave my troubles outside. It was a time when I could actually relax." Being able to leave problems outside and retreat into a safe space is taken for granted by many Canadians, but it is a powerful experience for women experiencing domestic abuse.

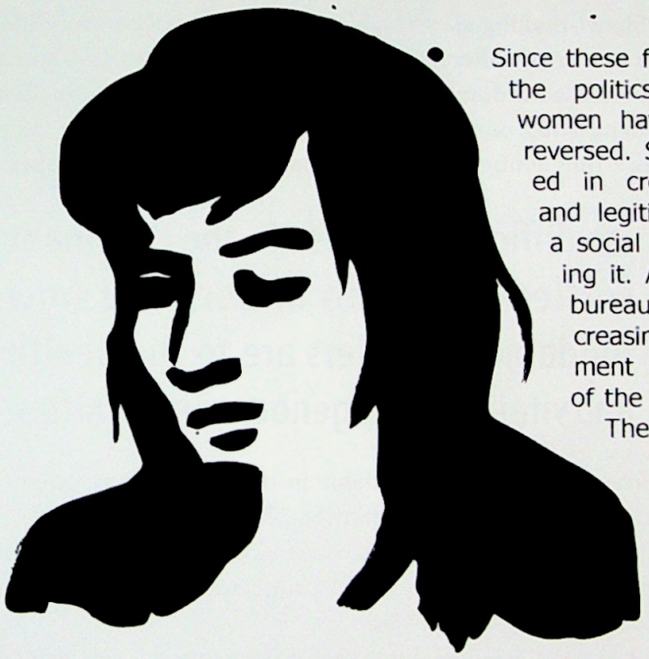
The women in our project were very clear that, for them, most domestic violence services are sites of harm and trauma: "dangerous spaces."

So what distinguishes the two shelters these women used from other domestic violence services? The answer is that both are committed to long-term decolonization programs.

Degendering Domestic Violence

Emergency shelters emerged in Canada in the 1960s, typically as grassroots feminist collectives. In these first shelters, connections between the personal and political dimensions of violence were clearly articulated. "Woman abuse," "wife battering," or "wife assault" were understood as resulting from patriarchal social structures that sanctioned and normalized violence by men against women.





Since these feminist origins, the politics of sheltering women have been gradually reversed. Shelter pioneers succeeded in creating public awareness and legitimizing woman abuse as a social problem, but not in ending it. And with legitimacy came bureaucratization. Shelters' increasing dependence on government funding forced adoption of the case management model. The neoliberalization of public funding in the 1980s demanded individually driven, outcome-based interventions amenable to quantification.

Whether by accident or design, shelters were forced to replace advocacy with administrative accountability and feminist organizing with neoliberal politics. This is reflected in the shift from the language of "woman abuse" to degendered terms like "intimate partner violence." It is in this context that "family violence" has emerged. This new paradigm focuses on children as the main victims of violence and not their mothers, downgrading women's victimization.

Graphic by Emily Davidson

At the Winnipeg conference, attendees emphasized that colonization causes violence in Indigenous communities across the globe. In Canada, assimilation policies and resulting intergenerational trauma forces Indigenous people to, as scholar Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux argues, "displace their cultural and spiritual activities," causing "social alienation and profound psychological problems, such as alcoholism, drug addiction, domestic violence, and sexual abuse."

Violence alongside poverty, poor housing and education, and substance misuse suspend Indigenous people in what Taiaiake Alfred terms "the living legacy of colonial violence." For Indigenous women, this living colonial violence further intersects with gendered discrimination, making them disproportionately subject to violence in their homes and in public spaces.

When service providers assume Indigenous women are bad mothers or just looking for pills, they inflict colonizing violence twice over. Our project identified social services' dominant case management model as perpetuating ongoing colonizing violence, but we also developed recommendations for how it can be changed.

Currently, services follow a westernized clinical paradigm focused on curing or "healing" individual pathology. The model separates abused women into different treatment settings like law enforcement, child protection, and physical and mental health services. Indigenous women are rendered individual actors doubly removed from their cultures and communities and the structural forces driving their abuse. Recently, with the emergence of the degendered family violence paradigm, the situation has worsened. The individualized case management of abused Indigenous women silences their voices, undermines their agency, and isolates them from their communities.

Stitching, storytelling, spirit

For my design, I gave it a lot of thought. I have a dream catcher with an eagle head in the centre, which represents my strength and courage that I have had to overcome the difficult trials in my life. My feather represents my five beautiful children and their birthstones. – Donna

Blackfoot shawl-making reverses this silencing. As she stitched her shawl, Donna shared with the group her story of abuse and alcoholism and how these damaged her relationships with her children and grandchildren.

In the group I learned that I am not alone in the challenges that I have faced in the past and now. It helped to hear the other

women's stories about what they have been through; it showed me that I am not alone, and that gave me the courage to continue on my journey. – Candace

During shawl-making, Candace spoke of her difficult past and the importance of her relationship with her young son, who gave her "strength to overcome the difficult obstacles of life." In the four corners of her shawl were stitched her and her son's handprints. In the centre was a bear and her cub: "They represent my son and I; like the bear family, we have a strong bond." Candace emphasized the benefits of listening to, and sharing with, other women experiencing violence. Throughout the conference, Indigenous people from across the world shared their experiences of violence in colonized lands. Their stories had a powerful impact on these Blackfoot women, who often commented, "They have the same problems we have." Surrounded by people with similar life experiences, they felt a resurgence of Indigenous identity.

The shelter project sessions in southern Alberta created a collective spirit, as Blackfoot shawl-making is more than stitching.

Kathryn dances with her shawl in Winnipeg.

Blackfoot custom emphasizes sharing, kindness, and respect for the unique gifts each person can offer the community. Candace had more sewing experience than the rest of the group and used this to help others complete the hemming. Her gentle prodding and easygoing laughter encouraged some to use the sewing machine for the first time. Shawl-making embodies the potential of the individual within the community. Through their sewing, the women modelled Blackfoot knowledge.

I recommend that Elders be available at the shelter on a weekly basis so that we can get guidance and support when we need it. – Candace

Elders attended each project session. One, an expert seamstress and beader, guided the group on using the sewing machine, while another assisted with hemming. Elders never instructed but worked alongside the women, providing expert opinion on, or assistance with, sewing and constructing symbols when asked. The Elders were counsellors and mentors in the group. They encouraged the women to share stories of their mothers and grandmothers and also of their own lives.

By sharing their stories, Elders helped the participants understand that barriers can be overcome. It's difficult for those in the dominant settler culture to understand how fundamental Elders are to the health and vitality of Indigenous communities. They have lived long lives and overcome many challenges and also carry knowledge from the past, reaffirming language and culture. Involving Elders in services and projects may be the quickest and most effective way to help Indigenous women move forward from violence.

Shawl-making uses Blackfoot knowledge of community and the power of collective spirit but it also creates this spirit. In contrast to the domestic violence services these women identify as dangerous, our project revealed that spaces became safer the more they embodied cultural connections. The support and guidance from Elders available in the shelters was one of the main reasons they were identified by the women as safe. This safety only increased with provision of culturally appropriate activities including spiritual programming and spaces for smudging and prayer.

It's difficult for those in the dominant settler culture to understand how fundamental Elders are to the health and vitality of Indigenous communities.

Blackfoot shawl-making therefore proved a powerful tool for decolonization. The Blackfoot women in our project felt a profound sense of connection with their children, families, communities, culture, and land. These connections foster hope and strength in recovering from violence, and the women in our project clearly asked for domestic violence services to facilitate *more* connections not fewer. Their recommendations challenge the dominant, individualized case management model, which positions Indigenous women in fragmented, often-hostile treatment settings. The dominant approach does not prevent domestic violence; in fact, it reproduces the colonizing estrangements that fuel violence in Indigenous communities.

Indigenous people alone cannot overcome colonization's systemic inequalities. Responding to the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission into Indian residential schools, author and researcher Paulette Regan argued Canadians must "unsettle the settler within" by investigating and accepting "how colonial violence is woven into the fabric of Canadian history in an unbroken thread from past to present."

It's clear that domestic violence services must undergo a profound re-evaluation based on Indigenous communities' assessments of their own needs. As a first step, we recommend all domestic violence service staff receive ongoing training in colonization's impact on Indigenous women, their families, and communities. Our experts, 13 Blackfoot women, were adamant

Blackfoot shawls displayed at the International Indigenous Voices in Social Work Conference in Winnipeg.

that all community members be invited to and included in these consciousness-raising sessions. They recommended that culturally based domestic violence service and outreach programs dedicated to traditional parenting and life skills be available to whole families, extended families, and community members.

"How did you do this?"

I recommend that this program continue so that other women [can] participate. It is a tool that helps in daily life. The best part is that after my shawl was completed, it represented ... better things to come and a bright future for me. - Gloria

As the conference presentation closed, many in the audience waited to connect with the women, to say thank you, to share how moved they were, or to offer support. One attendee approached us to ask: "How did you do this?" In other words, what was the secret? Our project's journey from first meetings with concerned community members and Elders to that climactic moment in Winnipeg was challenging and complex. But in our hearts we had one answer: relationships. Our capacity to mobilize the project resulted from trusting relationships built through significant time investment. Some of us have worked together for more than a decade striving to decolonize our part of Treaty Seven territory.

But the project's success depended on another kind of investment: adequate, secure funding. Our project succeeded because we had funding for shawl materials, gas to transport women from rural locations, and honorariums, not to mention for staff wages, child care, and food.

In recent years, we have watched politicians across the political spectrum make communities responsible for systemic problems, using the rhetoric of community-based approaches to justify deep cuts in public funding. Listening to Gloria and the other women testify to the transformative value of the project confirmed our belief that it represented the best of community-based research. But it would never have happened without, first, adequate, secure funding; and, second, trusting relationships between communities and service providers resulting from years of shared decolonizing work. Future projects to help the thousands of abused Indigenous women forced into Canadian society's shadow will require the same.

Thank you to our directors, Julie and Doris, for making this possible. Thank you all for listening, and safe travels to your community. - Lisa

Art and the ones missing

In China and in Canada, artists are finding powerful new ways to commemorate the victims of ongoing government policies and inaction, to honour the dead and the missing, and to call for accountability.

By Matthew Ryan Smith

Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation (2008-2011) by Ai Weiwei, exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Photo: Marilyn Bellamy

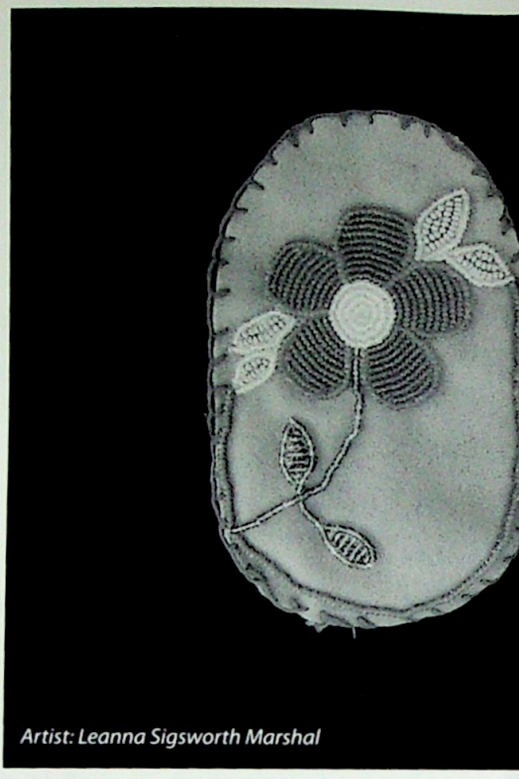
In August of 2009, Chinese police targeted artist and activist Ai Weiwei for agreeing to participate as a witness in the trial of fellow Chinese activist Tan Zuoren. Zuoren had co-authored a report criticizing the local Chinese government for failing to ensure that their schoolhouses were properly constructed before the 2008 Sichuan earthquake that left more than 80,000 people dead or missing. Weiwei was in the city of Chengdu awaiting Zuoren's trial when members of the police kicked down his door and beat him. A month later, Weiwei was visiting Munich, Germany, for the opening of his solo exhibition So Sorry when he entered the University of Munich hospital complaining of headaches. After close examination, Weiwei underwent emergency surgery to repair a brain hemorrhage, allegedly the result of the police beating. Wakening to a plastic tube draining blood from a hole in his skull, Weiwei took to Twitter to post photos that became selfies of resistance.

Zuoren's lawyer had selected Weiwei as a witness because Weiwei was conducting his own investigation into the dead or missing schoolchildren, the Sichuan Earthquake Names Project. Weiwei had volunteers collect data and create a list of victims' names after the Chinese government failed to publish the names of the dead or missing when 7,000 classrooms and dormitory rooms collapsed during the earthquake. On the one-year anniversary of the disaster, Weiwei posted the names of 5,205 student victims to his blog. "I believe this is the responsibility of the living toward the dead," he wrote of the project. "If it is not complete, the souls of the living could never be complete." Chinese officials quickly shut down the blog.

"This is the responsibility of the living toward the dead."

A recent survey exhibition of Weiwei's work at the Art Gallery of Ontario featured Weiwei's list of names transformed into an artwork called Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation (2008-2011). In the work, Weiwei printed the names, ages, genders, birthdates, and schools of known student victims across a massive wall. There, traces of the

Artist: Tara Beachem-Vesa (all photos of moccasin vamps by Walking With Our Sisters)



Artist: Leanna Sigsworth Marshal

dead or missing were displayed in a solemn public memorial. In documenting the names of the dead or missing schoolchildren, Weiwei's work resists the Chinese government's attempt to seal the dead or missing inside a tomb of numbers, as mere statistics.

China is not alone in its failure to acknowledge a systemic lack of safety for the people it governs. According to a new database created by Maryanne Pearce, a federal civil servant, as part of her PhD research, the number of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada has risen to 824. But the gauge of such loss does not lie in numbers but in testimony and remembrance, in the stories of affected families and loved ones where quantitative data has little value in qualifying emotional pain.

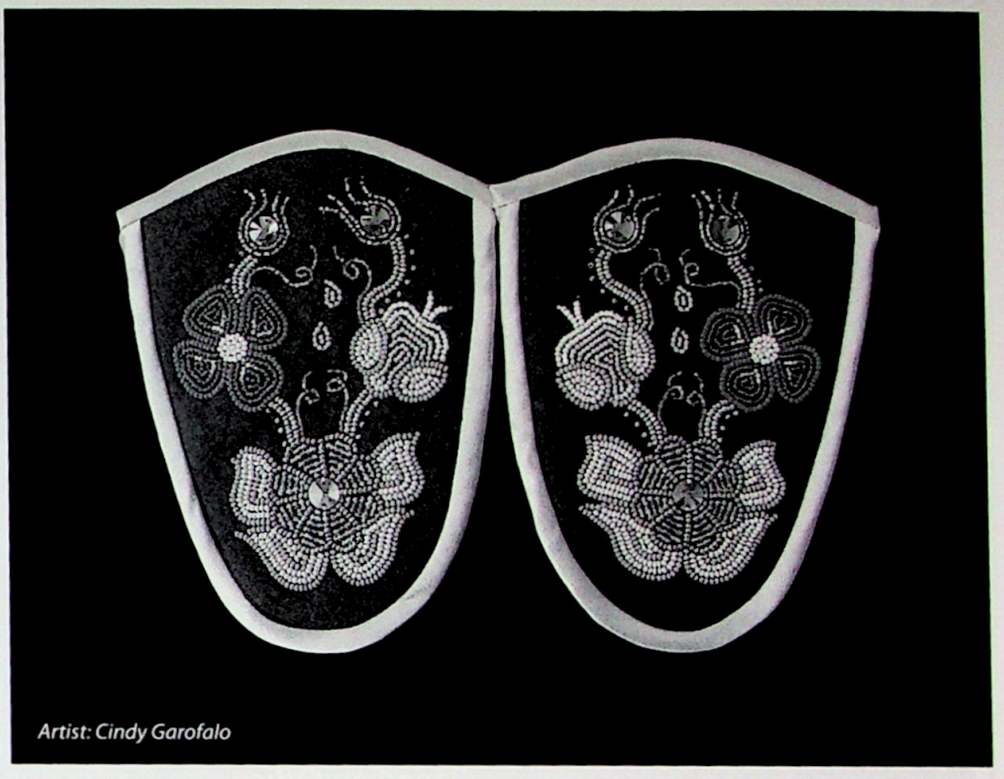
"Walking With Our Sisters is a vehicle for ceremony."

The federal government has thus far been resistant to addressing the issue. Prime Minister Harper has repeatedly rejected calls for a public inquiry, suggesting it would be a waste of resources. Amnesty International stresses that even the United Nations has repeatedly attempted to instigate a Canadian inquiry. In 2010 the mostly Conservative parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women was formed, but it waited four months to hear any testimony and was widely criticized for its ineffectiveness. On March 7, 2014, the more recent Special Committee on Violence against Indigenous Women released a report which once again failed to call for a national inquiry. In effect, Canada has failed its dead and missing Indigenous women, and now it's failing a public inquiry as well.

Like Weiwei, artists and artist organizations in Canada have turned to art for accountability and memorialization. Doing so brings artists and communities together so they may gain strength, find resolve, and hold some stillness amid the chaos. One of the most powerful of these works is Vigil by the Anishinaabek artist Rebecca Belmore, performed in Vancouver's notorious Downtown Eastside. The performance stands as a raw articulation of loss. In the work, Belmore scrubs the street clean, lights commemorative candles, shouts the names of missing Indigenous women scrolled across her arms in black marker, and then tears off her dress. According to the art historian Claudette Lauzon, "Belmore's is a body that refuses to vanish from a space in which women's bodies are *expected* to vanish without a trace." The overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls working in the sex trade goes hand-in-hand with the threat and reality of violence. Belmore's body and voice present a challenge to the silence engulfing the murdered and missing and the complicity of police services. Ultimately her performance seeks to prevent Vancouver's missing women from becoming mere statistics.

The Walking With Our Sisters project also memorializes murdered and missing Indigenous women, using art and craft to forge social collaborations. It is both an international touring art exhibition and a model for community engagement. To date, 1,372 people – from Brisbane to Munich to Calgary – have contributed self-made moccasin vamps, or tops, which are then displayed on walls and floors of venues.

While each pair of vamps represents a missing or murdered Indigenous woman, the unfinished moccasins represent their incomplete lives. The murdered or missing cannot be present, but the vamps are a marker of their spiritual presence and living memory. "Walking With Our Sisters is actually a vehicle for ceremony, and it is a memorial where the audience and artists participate in the act of honouring," says Christi Belcourt, an

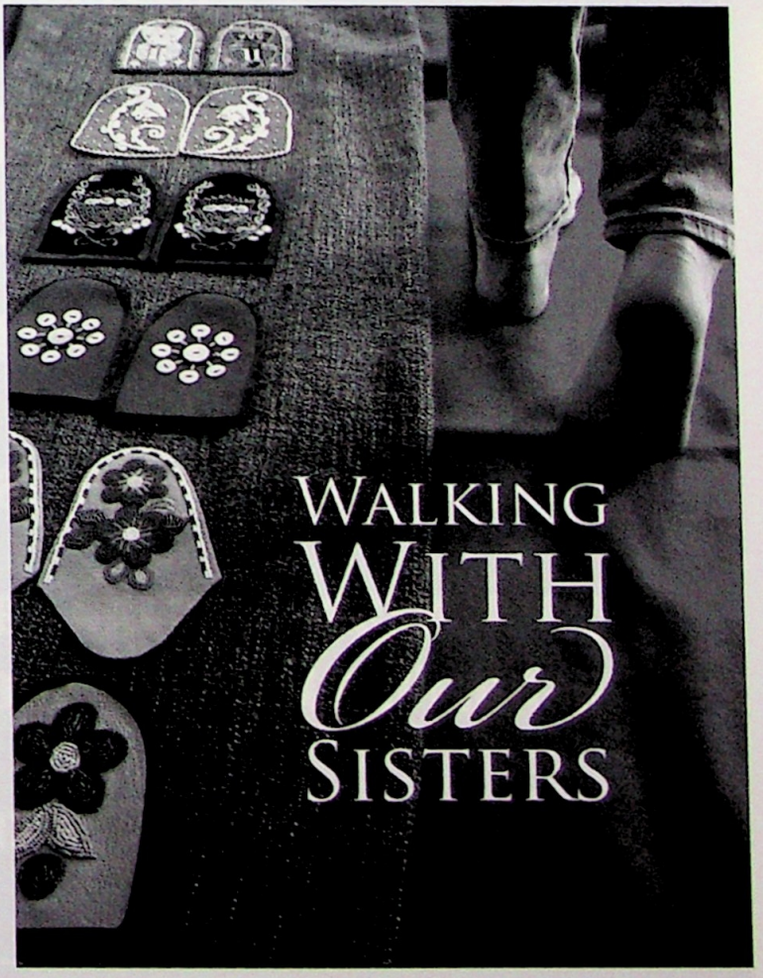


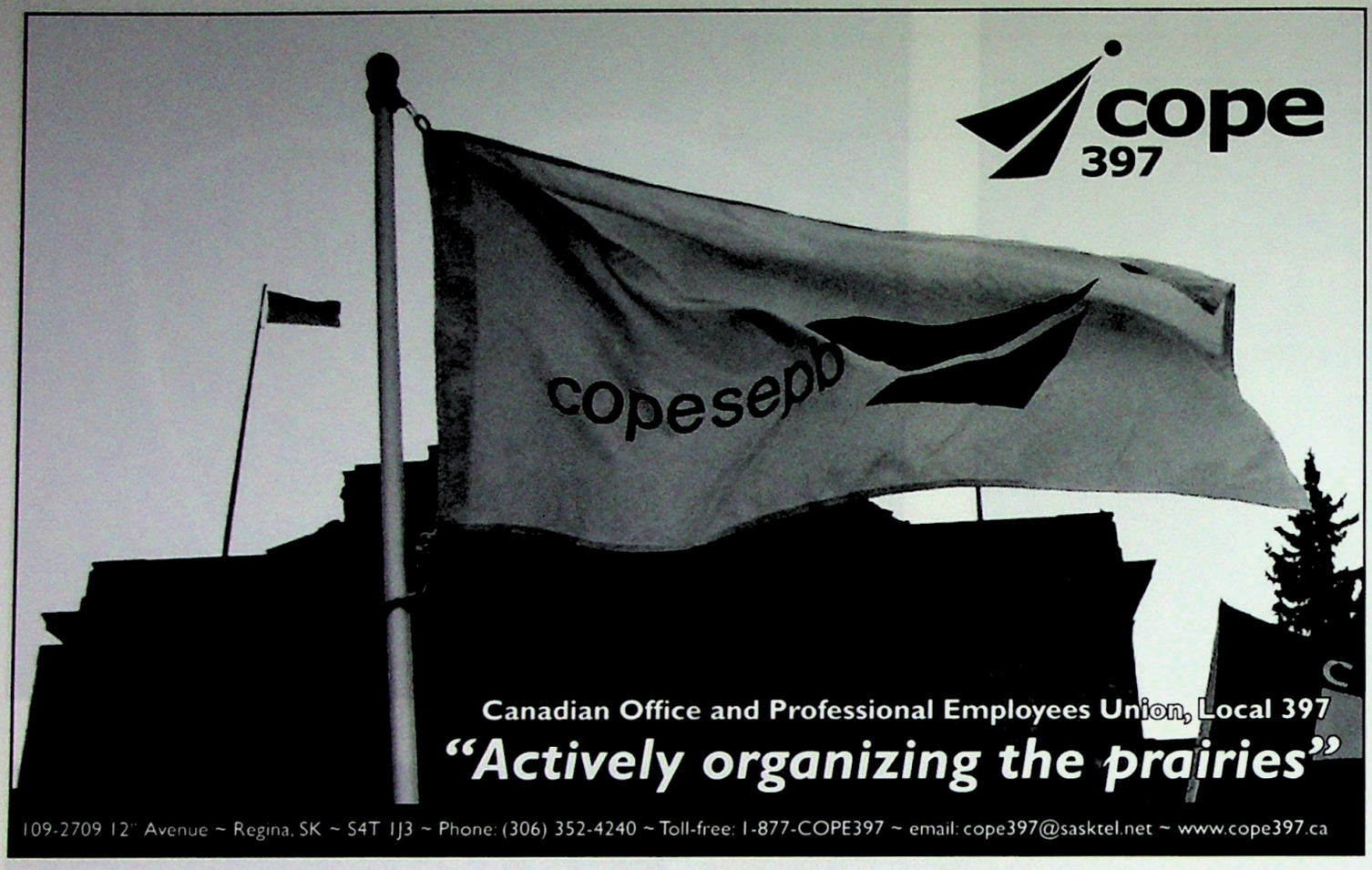
Artist: Cindy Garofalo

artist and organizer with the project. "It is about respecting the lives of the women and girls through community participation in the piece, and by our consolidated participation, we are declaring that their lives have value." Walking With Our Sisters is, above all, an act of love and respect, but it's also an act of justice and intervention.

Whether in university galleries or the Métis Hall in The Pas, MB, each exhibit includes the opportunity for prayer and the symbolic offering of tobacco. As with Weiwei's project, Walking With Our Sisters has used volunteer collaborators and social media to gather resources. The project has also relied on crowd-sourced funding and online auctions rather than government grants. The auctions raised $38,000 in 20 days in August 2013 which was shared between the grassroots organizations Families of Sisters in Spirit and Tears4Justice.

Though the contexts in China and Canada differ – one an unpredictable natural disaster and the other a systemic breach of human welfare originating in colonization – the government response in both cases screams of transgression. "If we remove the labels of communist or democratic and simply look at the actions of those in power," Belcourt reminds us, "then politics are a shallow excuse to ignore what we know instinctively to be just." In these examples, it is clear that art can represent a public inquiry of a different order. It communicates when others do not. Ai Weiwei's work is radically political because it exposes power's evasion of accountability. The work's formal structure – a list of names – means that it can be restaged at sites throughout the world; it is versatile and resistant to censorship. The subject matter of Weiwei's work finds a chilling parallel in Stephen Harper's resistance to launching a national public inquiry into Canada's missing and murdered Indigenous women. Rebecca Belmore's Vigil and the ongoing Walking With Our Sisters project embrace the lives behind the numbers, using art as a means for knowledge, healing, and accountability.

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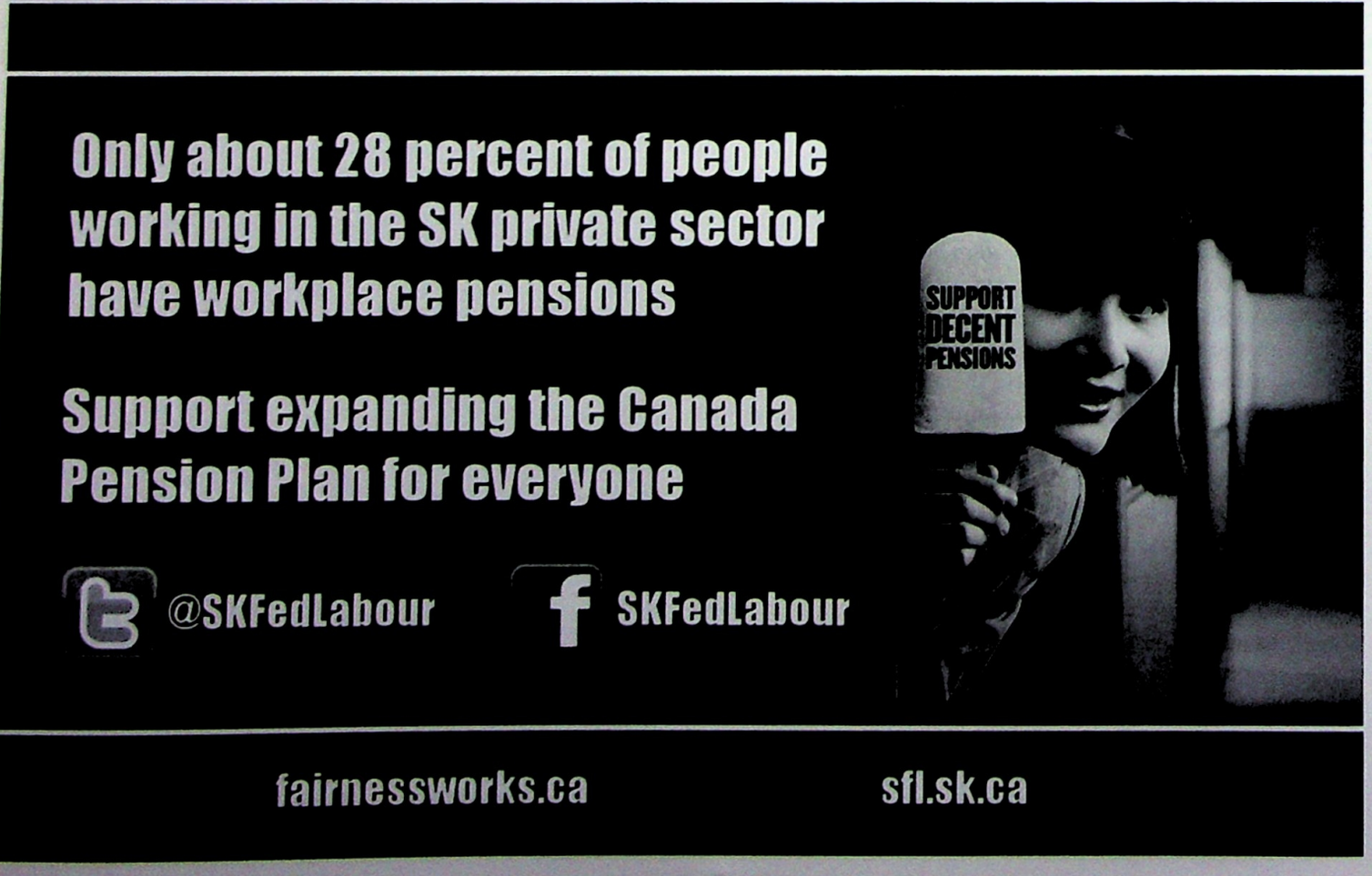
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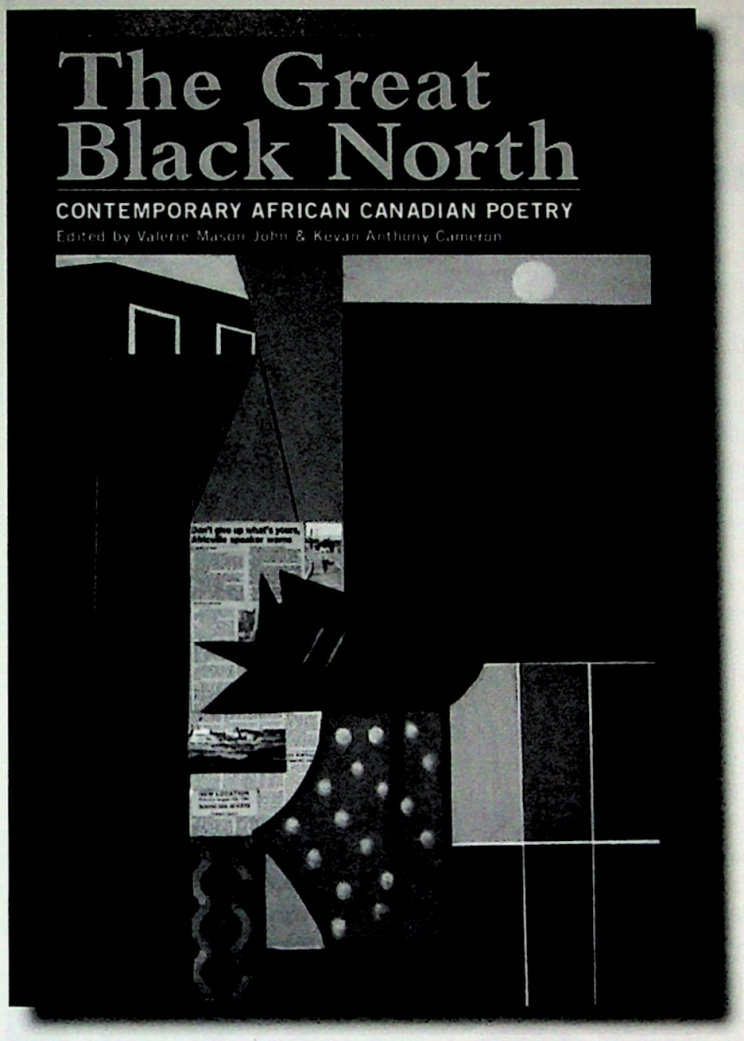


The Great Black North: Contemporary African Canadian Poetry

Edited by Valerie Mason-John and Kevan Anthony Cameron

Frontenac House, 2013

Reviewed by Tiana Reid

Without a meaningful preface, and sometimes even with that imperative framing, anthologies fail to capture what they set out to present. *The Great Black North* is the first comprehensive anthology of black Canadian poetry since Harold Head's *Canada in Us Now* was published in 1976, and the editors have a simple argument: performance poetry is poetry. Edited by performance poets Valerie Mason-John and Kevan Anthony Cameron, the book both sets a stage and is an attempt at staging history, archive, tradition, and the perhaps baffling idea of Canadian blackness.

In this staging, the literal stage of performance spaces is privileged. The collection, featuring poetry from more than 90 poets, divides the poems into "page" or "stage," with the former devoted to the written poetry of writers like M. NourbeSe Philip and Olive Senior and the three-part stage section showcasing the performance genres of dub, spoken word, and slam. In this way, the anthology rejects the Eurocentric conception of literature that has tended to disregard oral traditions and the unwritten word – the sounds of black poetry

Beyond the focus on performance, another recurring theme is drawn out in George Elliot Clarke's introduction: weather. As a subversion of the expansive, snowy metonym of the Great White North, the Great Black North retains the former's meteorological largesse. It evokes the North Star and freedom for slaves, but it also has a more sinister connotation: the "black" of Canada's oil boom, a dystopia of tarsands and sludge. In an otherworldly testament to long winters titled "scenes from a winter home," Adrian Worrell writes: "canadian ash / coats my words."

It seems clichéd to talk about weather and Canada, but weather is a force that makes its claim on all people, even if it's untrue that weather affects everyone the same way.

The Great Black North evokes the North Star and freedom for slaves, but it also has a more sinister connotation: the "black" of Canada's oil boom, a dystopia of tarsands and sludge.

Nevertheless, weather conjures shared feelings promoting an imagined community. Talking about weather allows us to talk about feelings, sensations, and vulgar drips of a nose. We can talk about the kinds of bodily feelings invoked by Wayde

Compton's whirling "Loxodromic," a poem best read out loud without swallowing.

As a work relying on nationalism, obvious themes emerge in this collection, including family, racism, environment, education, violence, capitalism, and gender, but there are also more subtle themes, as present in John Andrew Omowale Akpata's "vibrato [that] can be felt across the street." Freedom, meanwhile, is less a theme and more a refrain. We hear it and we hear it, but we don't necessarily understand its meaning.

The collection labours toward a recuperation of history in the spirit of spoken word artist Komi Olafimihan's wish: "If I could / I would write you back to life." Capital-H history buries events easily forgotten by the national imagination: the destruction of Africville, N.S., or the life of Marie-Joseph Angélique, a black slave hanged in Montreal in 1734. Multicultural Canada's prided themes – such as the Underground Railroad – are not rooted in salvation here. No, they take shape in Michael Fraser's poem as "a Halloween of lies."

Weather conjures shared feelings promoting an imagined community. Talking about weather allows us to talk about feelings, sensations, and vulgar drips of a nose.

The collection positions black Canadians as part of the polity, as poetic subjects deserving of critical praise, as historical. Yet many poets spend so much time wanting to be included in Canada's multicultural plan they fail to present the stakes of inclusion. That is, they fail to offer critiques of the state itself. Canada's diversity myth is taken for granted as a natural medley of people, a state of being, or an ambition, rather than, say, as Abebe DeRango-Adem's "chaos of forms."

In an attempt to bring clarity and rigour, the editors honour categories – print, dub, spoken word, slam – while at the same time failing to fully display the interconnectedness of printed poetry and performance. Because the majority of these poems were written to be heard, not read, we lose something on the page – uncontrollable shivers – and maybe we'd be better off going to YouTube. "NeoCanadian Version" by dub poet Klyde Broox, whose live performances convey nuance, reads as patriotism in earnest. For slam poetry, the audience is as important as the poet, but a book leaves you alone to mimic the snaps, the oohs and aahs. I missed the rasp and silent urgency in a voice like Ian Kamau's.

Much like the editors describe dub poetry as the rearrangement of ideas, the collection itself attempts to do the work of creating new meanings. Still, we could use more framing, groping, reaching, risk, and, essentially, more attention to the preface. As much as *The Great Black North* is a celebratory reminder that black Canadian poetry exists, and has long existed, this anthology also serves to bring a black poetic tradition into being and, ultimately, helps create a black Canadian poetry in the process.

QUOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

"Neither father nor mother, nor brother nor man nor sister, but the being that love proposes we should become at that moment because it pleases us or is important to us in this scene, in these arms, on this street, in the heart of this battle, in the hollow of this bed, in this protest, on this earth, in this space – marked with political and cultural signs, and permeated with signs of love. Often you are my mother as a young man, and I am often your daughter son, your mineral mother, and you my wild father, my animal brother. There are possibilities that have never yet come to light. Others, entirely unforeseen, that have come over us only once. Flowers, animals, engines, grandmothers, trees, rivers, we are traversed, changed, surprised."

Hélène Cixous

"The Founding Fathers of the United States equated capitalism with civilization. They had to, given their mentality; to them civilization meant *their* society, which was a capitalist society. Therefore, from the earliest times the wars against Indians were not only to take over land but also to squash the threatening example of Indian communism ... Some people get the idea that 'traditional' Indians want to go back to the 'good old days.' Especially, they imagine that because of our grave concern over the environment we are escapists who want to reject technology and progress. That is another part of the romantic stereotype. We have, and have always had, technology. We accept all technology that contributes to the well-being of our people, which *must* include the well-being of the Earth itself and all the life upon it; that acceptance is neither a new thing nor an 'accommodation': *It is one of our traditions.*"

Jimmie Durham

"History is not the past. It is the stories we tell about the past."

Grace Lee Boggs

"The country is making a big mistake not teaching kids to cook and raise a garden and build fires."

Loretta Lynn

"People do revolt; that is a fact. And that is how subjectivity ... is brought into history, breathing life into it. A convict risks his life to protest unjust punishments; a madman can no longer bear being confined and humiliated; a people refuses the regime that oppresses it. That doesn't make the first innocent, doesn't cure the second, and doesn't ensure for the third the tomorrow it was promised. Moreover, no one is obliged to stand in solidarity with them ... It is enough that they exist and that they have against them everything that is dead set on shutting them up for there to be a reason to listen to them and to see what they mean to say."

Michel Foucault

"Caring for others is accomplished by a dazzling array of skills in an endless variety of circumstances. As well as cooking, shopping, cleaning, laundering, planting, tending, harvesting for others, women comfort and guide, nurse and teach, arrange and advise, discipline and encourage, fight for and pacify. Taxing and exhausting under any circumstances, this service work, this emotional housework, is done both outside and inside the home."

Selma James

"If you don't write poetry, if you don't express yourself, that is, who you are, in one or more of the many art forms that exist in the human sphere: you're a partly crippled individual. You find yourself slightly gathered up at the shoulder or at the knee, or something like that; you're slightly tight somewhere."

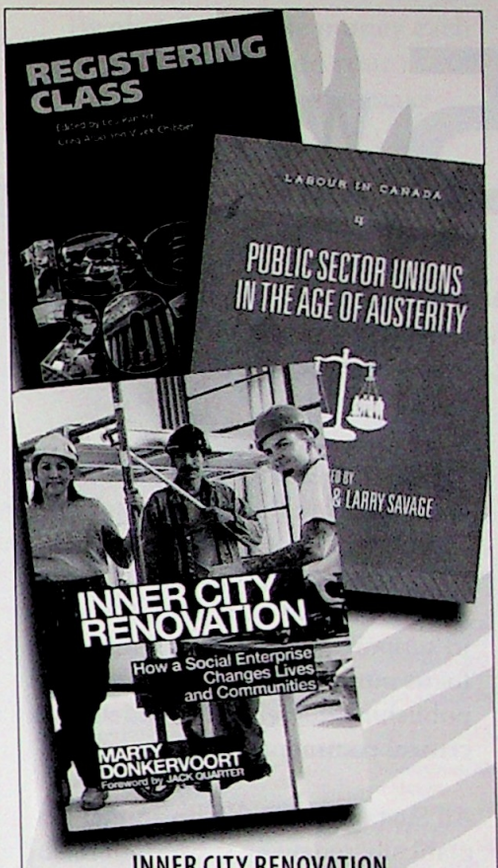
Ted Berrigan

"I was silent as a child, and silenced as a young woman; I am taking my lumps and bumps for being a big mouth, now, but usually from those whose opinion I don't respect."

Sandra Cisneros

"If hard work were really such a great thing, the rich would have kept it all to themselves."

Unknown Union Activist



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Sustainer profile #26:

Sheryle Carlson

Sheryle Carlson grew up on a small Alberta farm and lives in Edmonton. She has worked on environmental and social justice projects all over the world. In 2012, she finished her master's studies in human ecology in Sweden, through which she encountered anarchist organizing models from the Cooperativa Integral Catalana in Spain and got hooked on the holistic economic framework of degrowth. Her documentary For the Resistance, *made for the Alternative Information Center in Palestine, is online at vimeo.com.*

Did you enjoy growing up on a small farm?
I enjoyed being close to nature. As we tended to eat what we grew, I have a better understanding of where my food comes from and thus feel a sense of responsibility toward that. Since we ran a small, seasonal greenhouse business, I learned to contribute to and appreciate my family's labour.

What's the best thing about living in Edmonton?
The community of patient, kind, and generous people who have helped me grow and learn. I've discovered that they have my back, even when I leave for a while. The activist communities here are resilient, always fighting for people's rights for warm and loving spaces, maintaining a stronghold against the unchecked expansion of the tarsands, and nurturing connections to people in the North and to First Peoples. This community gives me a sense of belonging.

Why do you read and support *Briarpatch* magazine?
I actually came across *Briarpatch* somewhat recently through the tall piles of issues in the bathroom of a friend whom I admire. I dig that it's independent, openly anarchistic, and supports critical viewpoints and writers from across these lands exploring problems and solutions.

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After Mondragon

Whither the Prairie co-operative?

By Matthew Mickleborough

Mondragon has closed. Winnipeg's beautiful trouble of an anarchist workers' co-operative served its community as coffee shop, bookstore, grocer, and more for 18 ever-evolving years before finally locking its doors for good this past January, victim of another gentrifying city core. Mondragon was a hotbed of western identity and independence. Of the people and for the people, Mondragon taught us not that we can, but that we are.

The Prairies have always had their own mythology: "It's cold; we have to stick together." From before European settlement and on through colonization, communal interdependence has been vital to surviving this terrain. We came by our decentralized populism naturally. This is the land of Louis Riel and Tommy Douglas, where industrial capitalism was fought with rebellions, treks, riots, and strikes. The land, as Tommy said, where mice should see the cats for who they truly are.

The co-op insists there is worth beyond the ledger.

It is no surprise, then, that co-operatives in name and in spirit have been so foundational to Prairie culture. Co-ops stand for two fundamental principles: localized, democratic infrastructure and ethical exchange. Economies of scarcity, rife as they are with abuse, inevitably force workers to unite. This unity is the fiery heart of the co-operative. Such unity possesses the power to enforce humanity upon a machine obsessed with grinding it out of existence. The co-op insists there is worth beyond the ledger, that communal sustainability trumps corporate growth.

So why did Mondragon close?

In a world begging for community, what's happening to co-ops on the Prairies? The answer has three components. The first concerns the very nature of capitalism, which succeeds due to its commitment to profit. This spurs a continuous, accelerating race to the bottom. In this world, co-ops become victims of their own success. As they grow – after all, co-ops are more than twice as likely as other models to survive for at least 10 years – co-ops increasingly feel pressure to adopt capitalist practices at the expense of moral obligation, practices that hollow the co-operative of its significance. External, professionalized management is often recruited to better compete with corporate rivals – at the expense of labour-based democracy and accountability. To attract management, tiered wages conforming to industry standards become necessary, violating core co-op principles. With new management bolted on, the workforce becomes split, and authority is siphoned out of the community. At this point, the subversiveness of a co-operative becomes nothing more than boilerplate for the office letterhead.

The second thing is that the demands of moral economies have shifted. Co-ops must either adapt or sink into irrelevance. Historically, workers' co-ops defended the rights of their communities. However, modern social justice is only more shuffling of deck chairs if it does not seriously consider environmental impact. As I write this, I look out my window here in Regina to the puffing smoke of an oil refinery owned by the "Co-op." Indeed. The time for a new bottom line, where environmental sustainability takes its essential place alongside social welfare, is now. Co-ops, then, must resist the diluting pull of corporatization while simultaneously bolstering their core principles to match a changing world.

The third part of the answer lies within each of us. How could we on the Prairies, known for the fabric of co-operativism that is woven into us, allow Mondragon to fall? In post-scarcity economies, like much of modern settler Canada, communal responsibility takes a back seat to individual economic pursuits. The nouveau riche suffer from boom-induced amnesia and can't see past their own bootstraps. The result? An oily apathy smothering any social or environmental concerns.

Our "free" market achieves perfection only through total corporate domination, freed from human concern. Its influence already nearly perfectly eclipses all aspects of our reality: product shipped in and profit trucked out, while petro dollars, absentee investor states, and bubble nations ride boom-bust cycles into the coming corporate nirvana. The prosperity of local enterprise must be foundational to any ideology which pursues human dignity and sustainability. But then, as John Restakis says in *Humanizing the Economy: Co-operatives in the Age of Capital*, "the inability to imagine an alternative is the final triumph of an ideology."

And the true subversiveness of the co-op? Anyone can start creating one tomorrow, no revolution required. In a troubled world where solutions end up so vast it's easy to get lost just finding perspective, that is an inspired truth. The debate over which economic theory will cure the myriad diseases of capitalism will – and must – continue. But while such discussions take place, workers' co-ops provide an economic outlet that doesn't demand deal after deal with devil after devil. They prove that change is possible wherever there is a community united and determined. Let this be the enduring lesson of Mondragon.

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